

'I KNOWED HE WAS WHITE INSIDE':
HUCKLEBERRY FINN AND STEREOTYPE
IN THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY SOUTHERN NOVEL

By

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This study analyzes the African-American figure in Mark Twain's Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and in the southern novel of the twentieth century. In Twain's novel, Huck grows to see Jim as an individual removed from stereotype, and Twain's apparent intention is to demonstrate such moral growth in his protagonist. In the final third of the novel, however, Jim is reduced to the minstrelsy from which Huck had earlier rescued him in his celebrated decision to "go to hell." Twain thus returns Jim to the very literary stereotype he had initially challenged.

Many white southern novelists of the twentieth century follow Twain in portraying a white protagonist's moral growth through his relationship with an older character of

color. Like Twain, however, the majority of these writers return their protagonists' mentors to stereotype. The study considers William Faulkner's Go Down, Moses and Intruder in the Dust; Elizabeth Spencer's A Voice at the Back Door; Carson McCullers's Member of the Wedding; Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird; Sara Flanigan's Sudie; and Kaye Gibbons' Ellen Foster. These southern liberals return to Twain's model because, as Huck would have it, it is so "free and easy": the protagonists' hard-won resolve finally costs them very little and their society nothing. These "white saints" are ultimately valorized not for setting their companions free but for constricting them all over again.

The study further addresses the treatment of such relationships in three novels by African-Americans: Richard Wright's Native Son, Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man and Alice Walker's Meridian. Each of these writers repudiates and ultimately rewrites the archetypal relationship between Huck and Jim, determining that the figure of the white saint is inherently deceitful and condescending.

In conclusion, the study considers two contemporary southern novels by white writers, Ellen Douglas's Can't Quit You, Baby and Padgett Powell's Edisto, each of which effectively undermines Twain's return to stereotype while continuing to employ the larger motifs of his novel. These writers portray African-American characters as autonomous

figures, and the moral growth of the white protagonists
develops beyond the relationship to the world itself.

INTRODUCTION
LEARNING TO FEEL:
HUCKLEBERRY FINN AND THE SOUTHERN NOVEL

A persistent theme in the American literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is the development of a white character through a relationship with a man or woman of color. Among nineteenth century works, one thinks of Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales, Melville's Moby Dick, and Harris' Uncle Remus, His Songs and His Sayings, to name only the most prominent. In each of these works, a man of color attends the physical or intellectual development of a white protagonist, whether it be through the devotion of a Chingachgook or a Queequeg or through the provincial wisdom of an Uncle Remus.

In Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Mark Twain alters the pattern profoundly in portraying a white character who experiences moral growth through his relationship with a black man. Whereas the escaped slave Jim initially resembles the minstrel and mammy figures seen in black characters of earlier southern novels, Twain swiftly complicates his character by portraying Jim's emotional and physical longings. Likewise, Huck Finn's identity ultimately depends upon his decisions regarding Jim. When Huck apologizes to Jim following the fog sequence, he has

begun to sense Jim's basic humanity, and when Huck decides at the climax of the novel to "go to hell" (271) and steal Jim out of slavery, he apparently succeeds in escaping the hypocritical and corrupt southern society which formed him. Had he instead elected to return Jim to slavery, we would surely view him as an out-and-out moral failure. In such scenes, Huck, like Twain, removes Jim from stereotype and comes to see him as an individual.

As many critics have observed, however, Huck's eventual return to southern society is accompanied by a return to stereotype, exposing the superficial nature of his moral development. On the Phelps's farm, Jim, no longer significant to Huck's growth, reverts to minstrelsy at the hands of Huck and his deceptive friend Tom Sawyer. The moral growth which Huck experiences on the river never has affected Huck's behavior on the river's banks, and Huck's efforts to free Jim consequently lack their earlier moral resolve. Twain's initial intention to portray the development of Huck's moral identity through his ability to see Jim as an individual finally fails, and Twain returns Jim to the literary minstrelsy from which he had rescued him.

In this study, I examine the influence of Twain's pattern upon southern writers of the twentieth century. Liberal, white southern novelists have frequently recast Huck Finn and Jim, intending to portray African-American

characters emerging from stereotype, but, like Twain, these writers often return their black characters to stereotype. By contrast, southern African-American writers have repeatedly challenged the pattern which Twain established.

In Chapter One, I develop my analysis of Huck Finn, focussing upon the manner in which Huck balances his white identity against Jim's black identity. Leslie Fiedler notes such a pattern in his still-luminous essay, "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!," in which he argues that the relationship between Huck and Jim--like that between Ishmael and Queequeg--reflects the white American writer's unconscious longing for a prepubescent, homoerotic relationship with a man or woman representing a culture that white Americans have persistently oppressed. At the heart of the white character's embrace of the man or woman of color is, for Fiedler, a fear of repudiation: "Behind the white American's nightmare that someday, no longer tourist, inheritor, or liberator, he will be rejected, refused, he dreams of his acceptance at the breast he has most utterly offended" (670-671). Huck Finn is the first of many such "white saints," as I call them here: he looks to a black character for growth when forced to do so but ultimately turns from that character when he has achieved the growth that was necessary to his own development. Huck thus uses Jim as a springboard for his own escape from a society which he finds oppressively constricting. Though Jim, like Tom,

is to follow Huck to the Territory after the novel's end "for howling adventures amongst the Injuns" (361), they will not return to the river, nor to Huck's heightened awareness of Jim's black identity.

Chapter Two examines the early development of Twain's pattern in the southern novel of the twentieth century. In my analysis of two of William Faulkner's novels, Go Down, Moses and Intruder in the Dust, and Elizabeth Spencer's A Voice at the Back Door, I consider the ways in which these white southerners ironically undermine the return to stereotype that we see in Twain's novel even as they themselves employ similar conclusions. In like manner, in Chapter Three I consider Carson McCullers's Member of the Wedding and Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird, popular novels which reflect the pattern with less external irony than we see in either Faulkner or Spencer.

In Chapter Four, I look at two contemporary novels by white southerners which only rarely escape the pattern I'm discussing: Sara Flanigan's Sudie and Kaye Gibbons' Ellen Foster. Both novels closely follow Huck Finn in developing central relationships between white and black characters, and both return those black characters to stereotype in much the same way as Twain does.

In Chapter Five, I examine the ways in which southern African-American novelists have undermined the pattern Twain established by repudiating it in precisely the manner

delineated by Fiedler. Here I look at Richard Wright's Native Son, Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man and Alice Walker's Meridian, considering in particular the manner in which each of these novels subverts the role of the white saint as Twain had established it. The southern African-American novelist swiftly identifies and reverses the stereotyped portrayals of white southern writers in repudiating and ultimately rewriting the relationship between Huck and Jim.

By contrast, in Chapter Six, I look at two novels by white southerners which, while looking to Huck Finn as a model, reconstruct the relationship between black and white characters in significant ways. Padgett Powell's Edisto and Ellen Douglas's Can't Quit You, Baby produce visions of race in the South which break with the pattern that Twain established.

In my consideration of Huckleberry Finn, my focus is of course upon the effect of the ending, the center of critical debate surrounding the novel since its publication. A book could well be written focussing solely the critical treatment of Twain's conclusion: here, I look only to those critics who most closely address the issue of Twain's use of stereotypes in the novel. While my reading of Twain is in part drawn from his earlier critics, the connection I am making between Twain and these southern novelists in terms of race has gained little critical attention. Though critics have recognized Faulkner's debt to Twain, few

critics have addressed the parallels between Twain's novel and other writers I consider here in terms of racial representation. And rarely have these writers been taken to task for returning a black character to stereotype, as has Twain.

In describing these writers as "liberal," I employ Morton Sosna's definition of southern "racial liberals," white southerners who dissent from conservative southern ideology on race. The southern novelists I consider here demonstrate their dissent in portraying a white character to some degree overcoming--however temporarily--his or her stereotypes of African-Americans.

The novels here are southern in that they for the most part take place in the South (the exceptions being Wright's Native Son and much of Ellison's Invisible Man, both of which, as I will suggest, are novels very much about the South), but more significantly they are southern in their often strained efforts to address racial issues and racial interaction in the South, frequently through the absolution or denunciation of southern whites. Louis Rubin, Jr. notes that no sense of southern identity existed until those living in the South were faced with the possibility of the loss of slavery and that "the very idea of a 'southern' literature, as distinct from American literature, had its origins in the slavery controversy" (12). Thus these novels are southern in that they address race, an issue

inextricably linked to slavery in the South, and the central issue of southern identity even today. We see these writers holding a mirror to southern culture and criticizing the South even as they reproduce some of its more blatant offenses. That should bring little surprise, for such a transgression has been the South's central moral paradox ever since a southerner wrote that "all men are created equal."

While I look here only at southern novels, the pattern I identify is of course an American one, reflecting on an American dilemma. Lurking behind Huckleberry Finn and the southern novels which follow it is Uncle Tom's Cabin, written by Twain's Hartford neighbor, Harriet Beecher Stowe. In Twain's Jim--as in many of the black characters here--we see much of the character of Stowe's Tom. Where Jim is a moral gauge for Huck, Stowe intends Tom to be just such a gauge for Albert St. Clare and for antebellum northern society. In the process, of course, she creates a character irreparably mired in stereotype.

Stowe's novel lends to Huck Finn's character as well. Her charge to her readers in her epilogue presages Huck's supreme moral credo to "feel good" (624): "But what can any individual do? Of that, every individual can judge. There is one thing that every individual can do,--they can see to it that they feel right." Huck Finn, like so many of the white protagonists I examine here, attempts to do just this,

and though one result is his famous gesture of loyalty to Jim, feeling right for Huck--Stowe's hope--ultimately means returning physically and philosophically to his white society.

In a song called "Plow-Hand Blues," the southern blues singer Big Bill Broonzy laments the death of a plow mule. Addressing the inability of his young, largely white audiences to understand the song, Broonzy once told an interviewer, "'I'm talking about a mule dyin' on me.... What do these kids know about a mule? They never seen a mule. How do you expect somebody to feel 'bout something he don't know?" (Terkel 26). The white southern novelists I consider here frequently portray white characters learning to feel the experience of black characters, only to retreat from such a possibility. The African-American writers in the South who address similar relationships between black and white characters operate on entirely distinct premises. Through various means, they come to conclusions about their white characters similar to Broonzy's final assessment of his audience: "They never had no mule die on 'em. They don't even know what the hell I'm talkin' 'bout" (26). In my conclusion, I examine two novels by white writers that portray characters coming to recognize such boundaries, and at least partially overcoming them, in a sense redeeming the southern novel from the literary stereotypes of the past.

CHAPTER 1
TO HELL AND BACK:
MARK TWAIN'S SOUTHERN SAINT

i

In Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Mark Twain attempts to demonstrate his protagonist's moral growth through Huck's relationship with the escaped slave Jim. Because of their experiences together, Huck casts off his stereotypical thinking of Jim despite the imperatives of southern culture and comes to see Jim as an individual capable of human emotion and reasoning. That Twain regarded the book's intended aim as such we see in his celebrated recollection of Huckleberry Finn ten years after its publication as "a book of mine where a sound heart and a deformed conscience come into collision and conscience suffers defeat" (Lauber 109). By the end of his novel, however, Twain has ostensibly abandoned his initial pattern and apparent objectives and allowed Huck again to view Jim through white stereotypes of blacks as they return to the southern society which they had attempted to escape. By the end, that is,

Huck, like Twain, has returned Jim to the stereotyped position from which he so lately rescued him.

For many contemporary critics, this return to stereotype points to the suspect motives of Twain and other white writers after him. Rhett S. Jones argues that Huckleberry Finn "reflects and embodies white double-consciousness as Mark Twain shifts back and forth in his perspective on Jim and other blacks, now viewing them as full-fledged human beings, now regarding them as inferior folk" (28). Arnold Rampersad sees the return to stereotype in Twain's novel as the result of bias within a "typically American 'twinning' of white and dark-skinned characters" (50). The motivation for employing such characters, Rampersad argues, "is based on a sense of a black or native American familiarity with Nature, noble in essence and finally inaccessible to the white man" (50). And though such characteristics suggest that the dark-skinned character plays the greater role in the relationship, he remains

almost inevitably second in importance to the white hero. He is only an acolyte in the ritual of American absolution from sin--when he isn't the sacrificial victim itself. In Huck Finn, Mark Twain exalts Jim--just beyond the level of a white boy--but finally cannot allow him to remain exalted. Jim then becomes little more than a plaything, like a great stuffed bear, for the white boys over whom he once stood morally. (51)

For these critics, the difficulty with Twain's ending is not a matter of aesthetics or unity, the main reasons for which the book was attacked before Leslie Fiedler's fabulously

controversial watershed essay, "Come Back to the Raft Agin', Huck Honey!" Instead, they observe the extent to which Twain's narrative reflects the essential racism of American culture.

Other critics, however, have found Twain's struggle with his portrayal of Jim--his flitting in and out of stereotype--to have led to the possibilities for the portrayal of black characters significantly developed from earlier types. Ralph Ellison argues that Twain, writing as he did in the midst of the popularity of the minstrel show and shortly after a war which had left white Americans tired of addressing the problems of blacks, "fitted Jim into the outlines of the minstrel tradition, and it is from behind this stereotype mask that we see Jim's dignity and human capacity--and Twain's complexity--emerge" (Shadow and Act 50). As I hope to demonstrate in Chapter Five, Ellison in turn develops Jim's character to its full humanity in Invisible Man even as he undermines other aspects of Twain's novel. Whatever the "human capacity" present in Jim, he is clearly no fully realized human being at the end of Twain's novel. In the present chapter I develop a reading demonstrating the ways in which such a portrayal represents a failure of purpose for Mark Twain.

Tied to Huck's emergent sense of Jim's humanity throughout Huckleberry Finn is Huck's determined struggle with his own identity. He adapts a lengthy series of

invented aliases in the course of his novel: he is variously Sarah Williams, Sarah Mary Williams, George Jaxon. Ultimately, of course, he becomes Tom Sawyer. Twain contrasts this variety of guises with Huck's transcendent identity in the novel, most clear in the river passages in which he is cut off from society and linked closely to Jim. Here, as Rampersad suggests, Huck is at one with nature, and here, as he recurrently reminds, things are most "easy and comfortable" (155). Away from Jim, however, Huck's identity--like that of the typical picaresque hero--invariably changes, suggesting that Huck will ultimately cast off whatever development he experiences through his relationship with Jim once they have returned to society, as surely they must. Thus, throughout the novel, Twain prepares us for Huck's ultimate betrayal of Jim, even if many engaged readers have been all too willing to be duped into hoping it shall be otherwise.

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From the beginning of his novel, Twain attempts to portray Jim as the primary agent of identity for Huck: through his relationship with Jim, Huck will come to comprehend himself better as an individual living within a constricting and hypocritical culture. As the second chapter opens, Huck and Tom Sawyer are stealing away from

the Widow Douglas's house past Jim, and Huck's initial portrayal of Jim imparts the significance the relationship will come to have for both: "We scrouched down and laid still, Miss Watson's big nigger, named Jim, was setting in the kitchen door; we could see him pretty clear, because there was a light behind him. He got up and stretched his neck out a minute, listening. Then he says, "Who dah?" (6). Twain depicts Tom and Huck "tip-toeing along a path" as they attempt to escape the house and bowing down in hiding from Jim. At this early point in the novel, Jim ironically implements the moral codes of those who enslave him: Huck and Tom fear him because he reminds them of the Widow's restrictive values which won't permit midnight flights from the house. Later, of course, Jim will continue to act as a catalyst for Huck's moral development through his rejection of "conscience," which Huck equates with the moral ideology of the society in which he is raised. Twain portrays Jim as a figure of moral identity for Huck as Jim even at this early moment in the text provides a moral standard for Huck. Jim reminds Huck of his obligations to the Widow and Miss Watson as he stands at the porch much as he will later inform Huck of other, vastly different obligations.

Though Huck and Tom see Jim "pretty clear" as he searches into the darkness for them, Jim cannot determine the source of the noise that he has heard. And Huck will remain an unknown quantity for Jim until they link their two

causes in escaping Jackson's Island. Indeed, throughout the novel, Jim will be questioning Huck, metaphorically demanding that Huck define himself, declare his identity, by first aligning himself with or against Jim. In this early moment in the text, Jim begins to question Huck: "Who dah?" he asks, just as he will later ask Huck to reveal himself morally.

Hearing no response to his question, Jim continues to seek out the source of the noise he has heard:

He listened some more; then he come tip-toeing down and stood right between us; we could a touched him, nearly. Well, likely it was minutes and minutes that there warn't a sound, and we all there so close together. There was a place on my ankle that got to itching; but I dasn't scratch it; and then my ear begun to itch; and next my back, right between my shoulders. Seemed like I'd die if I couldn't scratch. . . . Pretty soon Jim says:

"Say--who is you? Whar is you? Dog my cats ef I didn' hear sumf'n. Well, I knows what I's gwyne to do. I's gwyne to set down here and listen tell I hears it agin." (6)

Jim's questions again demonstrate the role he will take in relation to Huck through much of Twain's novel: these are the questions that he will figuratively ask of Huck time and again in the course of the narrative. As he stands between the two boys in the darkness, Jim separates Huck from his companion Tom, whom Twain painstakingly portrays as a force within this southern society throughout the novel (from the first page of the novel, in fact, where Huck recollects that it was Tom who first came after him when he escaped the Widow Douglas' house: "Tom Sawyer, he hunted me up and said

he was going to start a band of robbers, and I might join if I would go back to the widow and be respectable" [1-2]). If Huck feels physically uncomfortable here ("Seemed like I'd die if I couldn't scratch."), it is because Jim forces him wholly outside of this southern society in separating him from Tom Sawyer. And if Huck Finn is finally about the alienation that Huck feels as he confronts the hypocrisy of slavery and of southern culture, in this moment we begin to see an inkling of this alienation. Huck's misery at being placed next to Jim and thus separated from Tom is representative of the struggle of conscience which he will face on the river: it is precisely this proximity to Jim which will finally force Huck to identify and cope with the moral conflicts of his southern society.

In this early section of the novel, Huck retains the passive role that he played throughout The Adventures of Tom Sawyer. When Jim falls asleep after lying down to wait out the boys, Huck and Tom successfully escape. To Huck's consternation, however, Tom insists on returning to play a trick on Jim:

When we was ten foot off, Tom whispered to me and wanted to tie Jim to the tree for fun; but I said no; he might wake and make a disturbance, and then they'd find out I warn't in. Then Tom said he hadn't got candles enough, and he would slip in the kitchen and get some more. I didn't want him to try. I said Jim might wake up and come. But Tom wanted to resk it; so we slid in there and got three candles, and Tom laid five cents on the table for pay. Then we got out, and I was in a sweat to get away; but nothing would do but Tom he must crawl to where Jim was, on his hands and knees, and play something on him. I waited, and it

seemed a good while, everything was so still and lonesome. (7)

Tom here plays a role similar to that he will play at the end of the novel: he attempts to overcome his vagrant sense of remorse for stealing the candles by reimbursing his victim. Likewise, at the end of the novel, he will pay Jim forty dollars for having successfully endured the boys' prolonged progress toward Jim's escape. Tom assumes a paternalistic role toward Jim from the beginning of the novel, assuming control of Jim by virtue of his ability to pay for his moral transgressions. Thus Tom provides stark contrast to Huck Finn even as he acts as a model for Huck: cut off from both Tom and Jim, Huck here experiences his first moment of serious reflection upon the larger themes of the novel as he feels "all still and lonesome," waiting for Tom to return from playing his trick upon Jim.

Upon returning, Tom reveals to Huck that he "slipped Jim's hat off of his head and hung it on a limb right over him." Jim's later assessment that witches "bewitched him and put him in a trance, and rode him all over the State" is hardly far-fetched, considering that Tom's trick here closely resembles the lynching that plagued the South as Twain wrote the novel. While Jim comically imagines that he has been conjured by witches, Twain's reader might well have imagined a different fate entirely. Tom's "trick" turns upon the reader and evokes the larger themes which Twain will address as his novel develops.

Tom's manipulations of Jim result in Jim's first subordination to minstrelsy, and it is a role Jim will play frequently in the novel. Yet, in elaborating upon his story of having been "rode by witches," Jim gains the respect of other slaves in the area: "Niggers would come miles to hear Jim tell about it, and he was more looked up to than any other nigger in that country. Strange niggers would stand with their mouths open and look him all over, same as if he was a wonder" (8). If he here plays the role of the minstrel, in gaining the respect of the local slaves Jim turns the role to his advantage, as he will do throughout the novel. David L. Smith argues that Twain employs such strategies alongside racial stereotypes, thus "elaborat[ing] them in order to undermine them" (6). When Huck says that Jim is eventually "ruined, for a servant, because he got so stuck up on account of having seen the devil and been rode by witches" (8), he concedes that Jim has turned the trick to his advantage.

Twain's early portrayal of Jim suggests his intent to remove Jim from the minstrel stereotype: if, as Walter Blair demonstrates in Mark Twain and Huckleberry Finn, Twain did not know as he wrote these early chapters that much of his narrative would develop around Jim's escape from slavery, his portrayal nonetheless shows him breaking away from the stereotyped portrayals of earlier southern writers like

William Gilmore Simms. For Smith, such scenes "undermine rather than revalidate the dominant racial discourse" (6).

Huck's next encounter with Jim further emphasizes Jim's role as an agent of moral identity for Huck. Twain again plays upon stereotypes of blacks, here having Huck come to Jim to have him "do magic" and reveal to Huck the reason that Pap has returned to St. Petersburg. Huck asks Jim to consult a hairball: "What I wanted to know, was, what [Pap] was going to do, and was he going to stay?" (20). Jim's prophecy that Pap is wrestling with two angels suggests the very moral dilemma in which Huck will soon find himself: "One uv 'em is white en shiny, en 'tother one is black. De white one gits him to go right, a little while, den de black one sail in en bust it all up" (22). Jim's language ironically alludes to the stereotypical assumptions against which Huck will struggle as he later helps Jim to escape.

In the following scene, Twain further stresses Huck's rejection of Pap and--to some extent--of his own white identity in his vivid description of Pap: "There warn't no color in his face, where his face showed; it was white; not like another man's white, but a white to make a body's flesh crawl--a tree-toad white, a fish-belly white" (23). Such associations with whiteness will of course lead to Huck's climactic decision to steal Jim out of slavery and "go to hell" for doing so.

After escaping the Widow Douglas' "sivilized" constraints and Pap's brutality for Jackson's Island, Huck finds Jim, who has escaped from Miss Watson. As in his first encounter with Jim, Huck attempts to conceal his identity as long as possible. After searching through the woods for the campfire he'd seen earlier, Huck finally comes upon it and waits in the surrounding bushes: "By-and-by I was close enough to have a look, and there laid a man on the ground. It most give me the fan-tods" (38). As in Huck's earlier encounter with Jim, Twain stresses the emotional distance between the two. Huck's discomfort in Jim's presence, and his brief inability to recognize Jim, mirror the abstract distance Huck will feel between himself and Jim throughout the novel.

Huck's surreptitious movements parallel his attempts to elude Jim at the beginning of the text as he escapes the Widow Douglas' house. When he first sees Jim's sleeping form next to the campfire, he is filled with fear, the "fan-tods." Huck's apparent supposition that a white man is on the island threatens his own autonomy, as it threatens the fiction that he has created in escaping from Pap's cabin. As the "gray daylight" dawns upon them, however, Huck soon recognizes Jim ("it was Miss Watson's Jim!") and immediately loses his trepidation, as he is able to rely on stereotypes that he knows well in interacting with Jim. Concurrently, in Jim's reaction Twain reasserts his character's

superstitious nature which leads to a white fantasy of black behavior:

He bounced and stared at me wild. Then he drops down on his knees, and puts his hands together and says:

"Doan hurt me--don't! I hain't ever done no harm to a ghos'. I awluz liked dead people, en done all I could for 'em. You go en git in de river agin, whah you b'longs, en doan' do nuffn to Ole Jim, 'at 'uz awluz yo' fren'." (51)

Thus their relationship on the river is begun, with Jim genuflecting before Huck, passively pleading for mercy from his young interlocutor.

Huck and Jim's subsequent dialogue indicates the extent to which they both must struggle to overcome the mistrust inherent in the southern society which they have left:

"How do you come to be here, Jim, and how'd you get here?"

He looked pretty uneasy, and didn't say nothing for a minute. Then he says:

"Maybe I better not tell."

"Why, Jim?"

"Well, dey's reasons. But you wouldn't tell on me ef I 'uz to tell you, would you, Huck?"

"Blamed if I would, Jim."

"Well, I b'lieve you, Huck. I--I run off."

"Jim!"

"But mind--you said you wouldn't tell--you know you said you wouldn't tell, Huck."

"Well, I did. I said I wouldn't, and I'll stick to it. Honest *injun* I will. People would call me a low down Ablitionist and despise me for keeping mum--but that don't make no difference. I ain't agoing to tell, and I ain't agoing back there anyways. So now, le's know all about it." (52-53)

For the first time in the novel, Jim places his trust in Huck, and Huck's immediate response is to consider the results of such a bond, tentative though it may be: "People would call me a low down Ablitionist and despise me for

keeping mum." Despite Huck's claims to the contrary, these first pangs of "conscience" will indeed make a difference.

In the course of his narrative, Twain painstakingly traces Huck's growing sense of Jim's humanity through a series of epiphanies which reflect the profound conflict Huck experiences between widely divergent moral views. As they escape Jackson's Island, for instance, Huck links his own cause with Jim's, saying, "Git up and hump yourself, Jim! They're after us" (75). Identifying himself with Jim for the first time in the novel, Huck has begun to separate himself from the cultural mores of St. Petersburg.

In like manner, the dialogue following the passage in which Huck and Jim become separated in the fog reveals Huck's growing awareness of Jim's humanity, but such awareness comes only after Huck has first manipulated Jim in imitation of his friend Tom Sawyer. When Huck claims that Jim only dreamed their separation, Jim is incredulous:

"Huck--Huck Finn, you look me in de eye; look me in de eye. Hain't you ben gone away?"

"Gone away? Why, what in the nation do you mean? I hain't been gone anywheres. Where would I go to?"

"Well, looky here, boss, dey's sumf'n wrong, dey is. Is I me, or who is I? Is I heah, or whah is I? Now dat's what I wants to know?" (103)

Jim links his confusion here to his own identity, questioning his presence on the raft and his own awareness of himself. Huck returns to the duplicitous role he first held in relation to Jim, and Jim, having already cast his lot with Huck, can no longer determine his own identity: "Is

I me, or who is I?" Ironically, at this point in the novel only Jim demonstrates the capacity for overcoming racial stereotype and taboo.

As in the earlier scenes in which Jim questions Huck's identity, the focus of this epiphanic scene is the separation of Jim and Huck. Just as Huck constantly forgets his admission of Jim's humanity and his resolve to set Jim free, the two are time and again separated from one another in the course of the novel. Ernest D. Mason explains this pattern of digressions in the relationship as a "combination of revulsion and fascination, intimacy and remoteness, attraction and repulsion" (36) in which Huck's frequent failures of moral development are symptomatic of his "desire to worship Jim the child and dominate Jim the man" (38). Yet if there is an abundance of evidence to demonstrate that Twain's portrayal of Jim is severely limited by his insistence on Jim's passive nature (he is after all a descendent in the "good nigger" line like Stowe's Uncle Tom), it is also true that we see in Twain's portrayal that Jim is not only capable of a measure of manipulation for his own purposes, but that, as here, he learns Huck Finn's moral lessons before Huck himself does. And, unlike Huck, he remembers them.

When Jim realizes that Huck has tricked him, his admonishment leads to Huck's repentance and the passage that

Leslie Fiedler calls "an apology for all of white America" (Proteus 6).

When I got all wore out wid work, en wid de callin' for you, en went to sleep, my heart wuz mos' broke becace you wuz los', en I didn't kyer no mo' what become er me en de raf'. En when I wake up en fine you back agin', all safe en soun', de tears come en I could a got down on my knees en kiss yo' foot I's so thankful. En all you wuz thinkin' 'bout wuz how you could make a fool uv ole Jim wid a lie. Dat truck dah is trash; en trash is what people is dat puts dirt on de head er dey fren's en makes 'em ashamed."

Then he got up slow, and walked to the wigwam, and went in there, without saying anything but that. But that was enough. It made me feel so mean I could almost kissed his foot to get him to take it back.

It was almost fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger--but I done it, and I warn't ever sorry for it afterwards, neither. I didn't do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn't done that one if I'd a knowed it would make him feel that way. (105)

Jim once again calls out to Huck, through darkness, as in the first passage in which we encounter him. This time, however, he knows precisely who he is calling: in Jim's reckoning, Huck is (white?) "trash" for his cruel behavior. Here, he knows that Huck is "lost," just as Huck becomes emotionally lost upon hearing Jim's condemnation of him. Their reversed genuflections suggest that finally no true sense of "equality" is possible in this narrative, but rather that one or the other must take a dominant position in the relationship. The raft, far from being the placid and just preserve from civilization that so many critics have declared it to be, is in fact the site for a never-ending series of moral one-upmanship. If Jim here takes the upper hand by demonstrating a superior moral sensibility,

Huck will soon wrest it back from him. Huck's "apology for all of white America" is a characteristically short-lived one, and, though Huck claims he "didn't do [Jim] no more mean tricks," we will soon see that Huck deceives himself in such an assessment.

Huck is able to trick the whites on the river as he is not often able to trick Jim. And when he does trick Jim, he is remorseful, as he clearly is not with many of the characters he encounters in his novel, so many of whom deserve little compassion. And throughout the novel, Huck's compassion for Jim is fleeting and superficial. In his relationship with Jim he is a white saint, claiming time and again to take pity upon Jim. And if Huck is not the first white saint in American literature (his cousin Little Eva chronologically deserves that honor), he makes himself into a model for others to come, as I hope to show in later chapters.

Shortly after the fog passage, Huck apparently forgets his resolve and, telling Jim that he is going to see if they have finally arrived at Cairo, Huck sets out for the Illinois bank to turn Jim in. Jim calls to Huck as Huck strikes out for shore:

"Pooty soon I'll be a-shout'n for joy, en I'll say, it's all on accounts o' Huck; I's a free man, en I couldn't ever ben free ef it hadn' ben for Huck; Huck done it. Jim won't ever forgit you, Huck; you's de bes' fren' Jim's ever had; en you's de *only* fren' ole Jim's got now." (125)

Henry Nash Smith suggests that Jim's abundant praise comes because he guesses what Huck has in mind and feels obliged to do "what he can to invoke the force of friendship and gratitude" (120). Jim of course emphasizes the word "friend," a term which Huck himself does not once use in the novel. In the following paragraph, Jim describes Huck as "de on'y white genlman dat ever kep' his promise to old Jim," ironically alluding to the very social structure that he is trying to escape. In calling Huck a "genlman," Jim associates Huck with southern gentility, granting Huck the same power that Miss Watson holds over him.

Gentleman or no, when slave catchers ask him if the man on the raft is white or black, Huck is tempted to give Jim up, "but the words wouldn't come," much as he will struggle for words later in the novel in trying to decide whether or not to rescue Jim. Here the words he finds are duplicitous: "I tried, for a second or two, to brace up and out with it, but I warn't man enough--hadn't the spunk of a rabbit. I see I was weakening; so I just give up trying, and up and says--'He's white' (125). Huck's decision parallels his later decision to "go to hell": in both scenes he cannot find words to express society's desires over his own. His confession that he "warn't man enough" to turn Jim in to the slave catchers demonstrates the extent to which he links his emerging moral identity to his relationship with Jim. And of course, when he claims that his man is white, the lie is

only a matter of metaphor, as Huck will later in the text decide for himself that Jim is, after all, "white inside."

* Whatever Twain's conscious intentions in his portrayal of Jim, the unconscious ideology of his novel denies Jim his humanity. From the moment that Jim and Huck pass Cairo in the fog, Jim no longer has any opportunity to attain freedom of his own accord and must, by the end of the novel, be set free either by two mischievous white adolescents or by the hard-earned benevolence of his white mistress. The only unconstrained power Jim had as a slave in southern society--his ability to escape his master and earn freedom through the use of his own cunning and physical strength--is denied him when the raft passes the mouth of the Ohio River.

Having forgotten Jim altogether in his stay with the Grangerfords--and having shown no remorse for what he surely would have taken to be Jim's death--Huck is much surprised to see that Jim also escaped the steam boat which had sent them off the raft: "I poked into the place a-ways, and come to a little patch as big as a bedroom, all hung around with vines, and found a man laying there asleep--and by jings it was my old Jim!" (149). As when he first approached Jim on Jackson's Island, Huck here sees Jim's sleeping form, and, upon identifying him, claims a metaphoric possession: "it was my old Jim." Having re-established the social order on the raft, Huck maintains that the pair are content upon leaving the banks of the river: "We said there warn't no

home like a raft, after all. Other places do seem so cramped up and smothery, but a raft don't. You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft" (155).

Such bliss is predictably fleeting, however, and in the next pages of the novel, the king and the duke arrive to impose their own sense of social order on the raft, a white trash royalty. After watching the exploits of their guests for some time, Huck and Jim discuss the king and the duke at length, Jim concluding "dese kings o' oun is reglar rapscallions" (199). In an aside to the reader, Huck claims to know "these warn't real kings and dukes," but he elects not to tell Jim because "it wouldn't a done no good; and besides, it was just as I said; you couldn't tell them from the real kind." Huck's ironic commentary here serves to emphasize by contrast his developing understanding of Jim's emotional existence:

I went to sleep, and Jim didn't call me when it was my turn. He often done that. When I waked up, just at day-break, he was setting there with his head down betwixt his knees, moaning and mourning to himself. I didn't take notice, nor let on. I knowed what it was about. He was thinking about his wife and children, away up yonder, and he was low homesick; because he hadn't ever been away from home before in his life; and I do believe he cared just as much for his people as white folks does for their'n. It don't seem natural, but I reckon it's so. He was often moaning and mourning that way, nights when he judged I was asleep, and saying, "Po' little 'Lizabeth! po' little Johnny! its mighty hard; I spec' I ain't ever gwyne to see you no mo', no mo'! He was a mighty good nigger, Jim was. (201)

Huck again experiences an epiphany which forces him to consider Jim as a human figure. If he has just taken a

paternal role in withholding his knowledge of the king and the duke from Jim, Huck is also capable of understanding Jim as a paternal figure, though he will never relate to him as such.

Huck's final rejection of the king and the duke comes when he sees the extent to which they are willing to prey upon the innocents along the banks of the river. When he sees the two of them crying over Peter Wilks' death, he exclaims: "Both of them took on about that dead tanner like they'd lost the twelve disciples. Well, if ever I struck anything like it, I'm a nigger. It was enough to make a body ashamed of the human race" (210). Huck's metaphor is anything but innocent: throughout the text he is compelled to contrast the hypocrisy and greed of the white culture in which he was raised with Jim's simplicity and naivete. Though he has never "struck anything" like the king's chicanery here, Huck is nonetheless closest in demeanor to Jim, the character whom he intermittently insists upon referring to as "nigger."

Upon escaping the king and the duke, Huck runs to Jim and is once again taken aback by his appearance, though this time the moment is, for the reader at least, comic:

"Out with you Jim, and set her loose! Glory be to goodness, we're shut of them!"

Jim lit out, and was a coming for me with both arms spread, he was so full of joy; but when I glimpsed him in the lightning, my heart shot up in my mouth and I went overboard backwards; for I forgot he was old King Lear and a drowned A-rab all in one, and it most scared the lights out of me. But Jim fished me out, and was

going to hug me and bless me, and so on, he was so glad I was back and we was shut of the king and the duke, but I says:

"Not now--have it for breakfast, have it for breakfast! Cut loose and let her slide!" (259)

Huck's return to Jim--and to his central narrative--in this passage again reveals the metaphoric trepidation with which he inevitably approaches Jim: Jim comes with open arms but, gotten up as a sick Arab so that the travellers could float the Mississippi by day, he scares hell out of Huck.

The passage in which Huck decides to "go to hell" is, ironically enough, likely the most frequently quoted literary passage outside of the Bible in American literature. Huck determines to write his letter to the Widow Douglas and upon its completion he is relieved of the guilt pressing upon him by his conscience: "I felt all good and washed clean of sin for the first time I had ever felt so in my life, and I knowed I could pray now" (269). The language he uses here, despite his good feelings, is of course not his own: he has learned it from Miss Watson and from the Widow Douglas. And given that fact, Huck's hedonistic personality will surely gravitate toward language which will give him more pleasure and require less Christian ardor. "Feeling good" may be a credo for Huck Finn, but he has surely never before felt good because he is "all washed clean of sin" so that he could pray. His thoughts quickly return to the river and to his experiences with Jim, which

he recalls in language contrasting starkly with Miss

Watson's:

And got to thinking over out trip down the river; and I see Jim before me, all the time , in the day, and in the night-time, sometimes moonlight, sometimes storms, and we a-floating along, talking and singing and laughing. But somehow I couldn't seem to strike no places to harden me against him, but only the other kind. I'd see him standing my watch on top of his'n, stead of calling me, so I could go on sleeping; and see him how glad he was when I come back out of the fog; and when I come to him again in the swamp, up there where the feud was; and such-like times; and would always call me honey, and pet me, and do everything he could think of for me, and how good he always was; and at last I struck the time I saved him by telling the men we had small-pox aboard, and he was so grateful, and said I was the best friend old Jim ever had in the world, and the only one he's got now; and then I happened to look around and see that paper.

It was a close place. I took it up, and held it in my hand. I was a trembling, because I'd got to decide, forever, betwixt two things and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself:

"All right, then, I'll go to hell"--and tore it up. (269-271)

The language Huck holds up here in comparison is--in Huck's terms--unmistakably superior to that with which he expressed his satisfaction at writing the letter. For Stephen Railton, Huck's recollection of the river passages defines "with great human clarity exactly what is lost when you call a person a 'nigger'--by showing us what you see instead when you call him by his right name" (397). Huck for the first time sees Jim completely outside of the variety of stereotypes which southern society places upon slaves: he sees Jim only in the context of their relationship. And, because, for the moment at least, Huck's catalyst is not an

action of Jim's (as in the fog sequence) but rather Huck's internal sense of goodness, Twain would have the reader believe that the moment, unlike earlier epiphanies in the text, reflects genuine moral development.

Yet Huck's innate sense of goodness--that "sound heart" Twain spoke of years later--matches his sense of the comfortable. As in the earlier moments on the raft, for all his ceremony, Huck does little but that which is easiest for him. When Huck "see(s) Jim," he sees mostly a fawning domestic: Jim stands Huck's watch, calls him "honey," and pets him. Fiedler finds in such examples a sexual union, and we can easily identify the dominant partner. Huck's apparent moral growth here finally represents no more deep resolve for him than we have seen earlier when Huck apologizes to Jim at the conclusion of one chapter and sets out to return him to slavery in the beginning of the next. In the final third of the novel, Huck's "hell" will be as innocent as a return to childhood.

In this final section of the novel, Jim is denied the humanity he has so lately gained in Huck Finn's estimation as Huck and Tom reduce his plight to a succession of raucous exploits. Huck, in his capitulation to Tom Sawyer's elaborate plan to free Jim, loses his resolve in this final section of the novel, a failure to which Mark Twain alludes in having Huck assume as his final alias the character of

Tom Sawyer. Huck accepts his new identity with a pious zeal, remarking, "it was like being born again, I was so glad to find out who I was" (282). His adventures as Tom Sawyer resemble the boyhood pranks and misdeeds which typify the first three chapters of his novel and the whole of Tom's book. Huck has returned to a childhood in which he reveres Tom, and thus he is more awed than horrified as Tom manipulates Jim for frivolous purposes.

We see Huck's acceptance of the ideology of the white culture upon his return to the banks of the river in his first encounter with Aunt Sally when she asks if anyone was hurt when his steamboat blew a cylinder-head. "No'm. Killed a nigger" (279), Huck responds. If we are tempted to read Huck's swift acceptance of white ideology as a necessary manipulation for his swift acceptance into the culture so that he might free Jim the quicker, we need only look to the following chapters to see how quickly Huck's plan to free Jim is postponed and altered once Tom Sawyer makes his troubling return to the novel.

Huck and Tom's adventures in helping Jim to escape are of course adventures drawn from Tom Sawyer's fiction and not that which we have come to expect of Huck Finn. The romantic fictions which guide Tom's thinking here also warp Huck's narrative and Twain's novel with an infusion of sentiment of the sort Twain regularly claimed to resent. For James Cox, Huck's return to Tom and to childhood here,

like Jim's corresponding return to stereotype, represents a burlesque which undermines the position of the reader:

If the reader sees in Tom's performance a rather shabby and safe bit of play, he is seeing no more than the exposure of the approval with which he watched Huck operate. For if Tom is rather contemptibly setting a free slave free, what after all is the reader doing, who begins the book after the fact of the Civil War? (175)

Thus the reader is implicated in Huck's failure at the end of the novel to follow through immediately with his resolve to set Jim free. And yet, if this is the case, it is also true that Twain participates in this same process of 'setting a free slave free' in developing Huck's narrative.

Following their escape, as Huck, Tom and Jim step out on to the raft, Huck heralds Jim's return to freedom: "Now, old Jim, you're a free man again, and I bet you won't ever be a slave no more" (340). It's hardly a safe bet, of course, and Huck's reduction of Jim's plight to wager reveals the extent to which he has aligned himself with Tom in this final section of the novel. If he has accomplished his goal of setting Jim free, he has in the process forgotten the urgency with which he made his decision to "go to hell." And in forgetting, he has lost his resolve to "take up wickedness" which we so admired earlier.

Huck's satisfaction at his success and Jim's freedom is cut short, when he and Jim realize that Tom has been shot in the calf in the escape. Despite Tom's insistence that they

"man the sweeps" and head the raft downriver, Jim insists that Tom see a doctor before they leave:

Well, den, dis is de way it look to me, Huck. Ef it wuz *him* dat 'uz bein' sot free, en one er de boys wuz to git shot, would he say, 'Go on en save me, nemmine 'bout a doctor f'r to save dis one? Is dat like Mars Tom Sawyer? Would he say dat? You bet he wouldn't! Well, den, is *Jim* gwyne to say it? No, sah--I doan' budge a step out'n dis place, 'dout a doctor; not if it's forty year! (340-341)

The speech represents an ironic and ill-fated transcendence for Jim, in which he equates himself with these roguish white boys who help him to escape. Yet Jim holds himself to moral standards that surely don't exist in his would-be saviors: Tom Sawyer has demonstrated himself to be just the type to say "go on en save me." Having delayed Jim's rightful freedom so long simply to indulge his romantic fantasy, Tom has been saying little else through the latter third of the novel. Only Huck has demonstrated sufficient self-restraint in the novel to consider Jim's humanity before his own, but Huck has apparently lost that ability at this late point in the novel. "I knowed he was white inside" (341), Huck thinks to himself after Jim's dignified speech, as though any remaining trepidation Huck may have had in taking Jim out of slavery is released with this revelation. Huck's ability to see Jim in moral terms as a white man, rather than his acknowledgment of Jim's humanity, delivers him from the fleeting remorse he has felt throughout the novel. Thus he bases his later assertion that Jim "had a good heart in him and was a good man" (314)

largely on the racist dogma which he had symbolically rejected in the earlier sections of the novel.

In "Chapter, the Last," Huck ties up what loose ends he has left in his narrative and effectively abandons not only Jim but, of course, also his friend Tom who has led Huck to the ethical morass in which he finds himself. Tom gives Jim forty dollars "for being a prisoner for us so patient, " Twain's apparent dig at the "forty acres and a mule" promised freed slaves. In return for Tom's charity, Jim gives abundant thanks:

Jim was pleased most to death, and busted out, and says:

"Dah, now, Huck, what I tell you?--what I tell you up dah on Jackson islan'? I tole you I got a hairy breas', en what's de sign un it; en I tole you I ben rich wunst, en gwineter to be rich agin; en it's come true; en heah she is! Dah, now, doan' talk to me--signs is signs, mine I tell you; en I knowed jis' 's well 'at I 'uz gwineter be rich agin as I's a stannin' heah dis minute!" (360-361)

Jim has thus made the full circle back to minstrelsy, as Twain once again emphasizes the superstitious and comic in Jim's character.

If, in the course of the novel, Huck has come to identify Jim as an individual in seeing the range of emotion that Jim is capable of as they float down the Mississippi, he closes his novel by once again forgetting Jim's individuality. At the end, Huck's decision "to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest" tacitly acknowledges his own need to escape a society in which he cannot help but be corrupted by the predominant ideology. In this there is

hope for Huck; he has experienced clear moral development through his relationship with Jim, has returned to society to shun that development, and finally, perhaps, senses that he must attempt to recover that which he had attained on the river. The Territory for which Huck lights out is the "hell" to which he has already resigned himself.

But if there is hope for Huck here, there is precious little for those slaves not so lucky as Jim or for the culture in which they find themselves. Through his relationship with Jim, Huck has sensed something within himself which is unable to accept the hypocrisy of his society, yet finally, this vision can be pursued only by using Jim as a springboard for his own escape. Ever the individualist, Huck escapes the very society for which his growth might have held some consequence. As Forrest Robinson writes, "The role of liberator in a world of resolute slaveholders is too much for him, and he collapses under the enormous weight of his decision [to free Jim]" (240). And with this collapse, his narrative devolves into a familiar pattern of black sacrifice for white gain.

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn represents a way of thinking about race relations that Americans have revered and imitated often, perhaps because, as Huck would have it,

it is so "free and easy" (128): Huck's hard-won resolve finally costs him very little and costs his society nothing. The fog on the Mississippi River in which Huck and Jim pass Cairo parallels Twain's own navigational difficulties in the course of his novel, considering that he left off composition soon after the passage was completed. Twain attempted to depict Huck's moral growth through the boy's relationship with Jim, but emerging from the fog of his own work, he passed his intended story and found himself drifting swiftly southward.

In The Company We Keep, Wayne Booth proposes an assessment of Twain's treatment of race in the novel which balances the stereotypical with the transcendent:

. . . though Twain's racial liberalism was inevitably limited, though he failed to imagine the "good Negro" with anything like the power of his portrait of good and bad whites, though in effect he simply wipes out Jim as a character in the final pages, he has still, by his honest effort to create the first full literary friendship between a white character and a slave, permanently opened up this conversation we are engaged in. We would not be talking about what it might mean to cope adequately with the heritage of slavery, in literary form, had he not intervened in our conversation. (474)

Booth himself immediately calls into question such a strained vindication of the novel, and concludes that the novel's merits in regard to its treatment of race are, well, unequivocally equivocal. Yet, strained or not, such a vindication of the novel has led numerous southern liberal writers after Twain to engage in conversations which propose little beyond Twain's opening statement. Setting out to

recreate a literary relationship closely resembling that between Huck and Jim, white writers in the South have again and again engaged us in a conversation about race which often leads us to the same denouement, in which a black character is redeemed from stereotype only to be returned to it. Intending to go to hell, their characters often return before they get there.

CHAPTER 2
WHITE SAINTS AND BLACK SAVIORS:
JIM AND HUCK IN YOKNAPATAWPHA AND BEYOND

i

The American novelist in the twentieth century has looked to Huckleberry Finn time and again both as a narrative model and as an archetype for literary racial relationships. Surely no blurb for an American novel has been more reproduced than Hemingway's assessment in Green Hills of Africa that "all modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*" (22). Yet Hemingway, like so many readers, was ill at ease with Twain's ending. The last third of the novel troubled him so much he recommended that the reader simply overlook it: "If you read it [Huck Finn] you must stop where the Nigger Jim is stolen from the boys. That is the real end. The rest is just cheating." Despite such harsh criticism of the ending, however, Hemingway continues his praise in judging that "it's the best book we've had. All American writing comes from that. There was nothing before. There has been nothing as good since" (22).

Other writers have frequently asserted the importance of Twain's novel to the American novel in the twentieth century and have attested as well to its uniquely southern characteristics. Allen Tate called Huckleberry Finn "the first modern novel by a southerner" (591). And Twain's novel is of course very much about the South: we see this particularly in Twain's biting parodies of southern culture in the feud between the Grangerfords and the Shepherdsons and in Colonel Sherburn's response to the lynch mob. But Huckleberry Finn finally pertains to the South in its focus on race and on the hypocrisy with which white southerners confront matters pertaining to race.

Few southern novelists have avoided completely the issue of race because it is so essential to any "reading" of the South. For a solution to the moral complexities of racial relationships, many of them have looked to the "free and easy" moral arrangement of Huck Finn. While all of the white southern novelists I consider in subsequent chapters look to Twain's novel as a model for revision, most recast the relationship between Huck and Jim only to return the black character to the stereotyped position out of which he or she had been so lately rescued. In the present chapter, I analyze two novels by William Faulkner, Go Down, Moses and Intruder in the Dust, and another by Elizabeth Spencer, A Voice at the Back Door, each of which confronts and assesses the question of race central to its vision of the South.

William Faulkner throughout his career addressed a southern mythology bound up in race. Like Twain, he frequently portrayed black characters as central moral figures in his major novels. Dilsey, for instance, is the moral axis of the Compson family in The Sound and the Fury, and, in vastly different fashion, Joe Christmas is at the moral center of Light in August, forcing the white community to confront racial identity before it can define itself. Both characters gauge the moral character of white southern society.

And if the moral lives of whites are intertwined with those of black characters throughout Faulkner's fiction, nowhere is that bond so apparent as in the two novels in which Faulkner is most indebted to Huck Finn. In Go Down, Moses and Intruder in the Dust, Faulkner employs characters of mixed race as moral guides for his protagonists: in both novels, the pattern of moral development within the white protagonist closely resembles that we see in Huckleberry Finn. In both, Faulkner reworks and updates the relationship between Huck and Jim for the South of the twentieth century, and, in the process, re-establishes the patterns of racial relations that Twain had initiated in the previous century. Where Twain's Jim remains throughout Huckleberry Finn a transparent and undeveloped character,

however, Faulkner's "Jims" are complex and autonomous characters, informed surely by Faulkner's reading of Twain but finally by his postbellum sensibility, his need to portray black characters largely shunt of the minstrel tradition to which Twain remains faithful.

iii

Critics have long pointed out the indebtedness of Go Down, Moses (1942) to Twain's novel, particularly in Faulkner's portrayal of race. R. W. B. Lewis argues that "the most significant prototype of The Bear [is] in Huckleberry Finn" (197). The relationship between the two novels, for Lewis, is most apparent in their treatment of racial issues, "in their common sense of friendship between black and white, in their common identification of slavery as a kind of original sin, in their common reversal of the conventional morality that legitimizes social injustice" (197). Likewise, for James Nagel, "The Bear" and Huckleberry Finn "seem to say that what is important in life is the capacity to rise above imposed values to affirm a code based on fundamental truth" (63). For both critics, Faulkner arrives at such truth through Ike McCaslin's relationship with Sam Fathers, a former slave of mixed Indian and black blood. But like Twain, in Go Down, Moses, Faulkner reveals an ultimate disavowal of the relationship

between black and white. Faulkner's Huck, here Ike McCaslin, attains a sense of independence from white culture through his relationship with Sam Fathers, yet Ike cannot finally bring himself to accept the debt that comes with his development, as we will see in the concluding story of the novel, "Delta Autumn."

The narrative of Go Down, Moses leads ultimately to Ike's renunciation of the patriarchy of Yoknapatawpha and thus of his inheritance and his heritage, a renunciation resulting in large part from his relationship with Sam Fathers. Sam is the noble savage--"the wild man not even one generation from the woods" (246)--yet he is no Chingachgook or Queequeg. Like Twain's Jim, he is no mere acolyte to Ike's development but catalyst for it as well. In coming to understand Sam Fathers, Ike happens upon a new vision of himself, shut of the moral and material dictates of white society. His abhorrence of his ancestry's abuses of the family's slaves is a direct corollary of his acceptance of Sam Fathers as moral guide¹.

Sam Fathers appears in Go Down, Moses, at the beginning of "The Old People," as Ike first joins the men who go each November to the wilderness to hunt. In teaching Ike to become a hunter, Sam first leads the boy to a sense of

¹ While Faulkner's portrayal of blacks in such stories as "The Fire and the Hearth" and "Pantaloon in Black" provides a significant background to Ike's perspective of Sam Fathers, I focus here only upon that part of the text directly concerning Ike.

himself as a white man living in a duplicitous white culture. With Sam as his guide, Ike learns a respect for the wilderness much different from that of the white hunters, for whom the wilderness is not a place to gain spiritual development. When Sam shows Ike his first buck, for instance, Ike immediately understands its symbolic value in a way that other white characters here do not: "he did not come into sight; he was just there, looking not like a ghost but as if all of light were condensed in him and he were the source of it. . ." (163). In the course of his relationship with Sam, Ike comes to see the wilderness--like the buck--as a symbol of his freedom from society. Like Huck Finn, Ike struggles throughout Go Down, Moses against a white society which he views as corrupt and hypocritical. Ike's white identity--like Huck's--must first be undermined in order for him to develop through his relationship with Sam Fathers.

At the outset of "the Old People," as Ike stands awaiting the buck which the dogs are running in his direction, Faulkner emphasizes Ike's isolation from white culture--indeed, any culture--as he enters into his relationship with Sam Fathers: "At first there was nothing," the story begins, stressing Ike's detachment in the "gray and constant light of the late November dawn." Out of the abyss come the voices of the approaching dogs, and, with them, Sam Fathers: "Then Sam Fathers, standing

just behind the boy as he had been standing when the boy shot his first running rabbit with his first gun and almost with the first load it ever carried, touched his shoulder and he began to shake, not with any cold" (163). After nothingness comes Sam Fathers, as though he alone is able to fill the void left empty in the white world into which Ike was born. Sam ushers Ike into his early manhood just as Jim accompanies Huck into adolescence: surrogate fathers both, they supplant inadequate or absent parental models for their literary children.

Out of the emptiness of that morning comes the ritual which bonds Ike with Sam, when Ike shoots his first deer, as Sam leads him through an Indian rite of passage. The passage in which Sam marks Ike "forever one with the wilderness" (178) is well-known but merits examination here:

The boy did that--drew the head back and the throat taut and drew Sam Fathers' knife across the throat and Sam stooped and dipped his hands in the hot smoking blood and wiped them back and forth across the boy's face. Then Sam's horn rang in the wet gray woods and again and again; there was a boiling wave of dogs about them, with Tennie's Jim and Boon Hogganbeck whipping them back after each had had a taste of the blood, then the men, the true hunters--Walter Ewell whose rifle never missed, and Major de Spain and old General Compson and the boy's cousin, McCaslin Edmonds. . . sitting their horses and looking down at them: at the old man of seventy who had been a negro for two generations now but whose face and bearing were still those of the Chickasaw chief who had been his father; and the white boy of twelve with the prints of the bloody hands on his face, who had nothing to do now but stand straight and not let the trembling show. (164)

For the first time, a rift forms between Ike and his own white culture after he joins with Sam through the Indian

ritual: as the "true hunters" look down upon the two of them, Ike feels excluded from the white society he had so much admired. And even as he feels himself distinct from his kinsmen, the "bloody hands on his face" mark the paternal bond that forms between himself and Sam Fathers in this moment. When Huck declares that the search party looking for Jim is "after us," he admits the bond between himself and Jim which places them together against southern society. Ike and Sam take a like posture here as Ike aligns himself with Sam against his own kin. It is in this moment, in which he first rescinds his white heritage, that he later realizes "he had ceased forever to be the child he was yesterday" (181). For Faulkner, Ike's growth is tied inextricably to the relationship which he develops with Sam Fathers.

If, as I have suggested, Faulkner represents Sam Fathers as a noble savage--albeit one whose virility is lessened by age--Ike's union with Sam becomes a celebration of primitivism:

They were the white boy, marked forever, and the old dark man sired on both sides by savage kings, who had marked him, whose bloody hands had merely formally consecrated him to that which, under the man's tutelage, he had already accepted, humbly and joyfully, with abnegation and with pride too; the hands, the touch, the first worthy blood which he had been found at last worthy to draw, joining him and the man forever, so that the man would continue to live past the boy's seventy years and then eighty years, long after the man himself had entered the earth as chiefs and kings entered it.... (165)

As he is wont, Faulkner portrays the moment through religious imagery: the blood on Ike's cheeks becomes here a mark of defilement at the same time that it reflects honor. Ike's whiteness is shed in favor of an allegiance to the "savage kings" who sired Sam. Faulkner bluntly portrays the union of the two as a rejection of western values: the sacrament is of the wilderness and Sam is its priest.

Yet if Ike proclaims a rejection of such values this early in his life, at the same time he continues to view Sam through the narrow filter of the white community's stereotypes of blacks. As in Huck's experience with Jim, however, Ike witnesses Sam's refusal to accept those stereotypes for himself:

In the boy's eyes at least it was Sam Fathers, the negro, who bore himself not only toward his cousin McCaslin and Major de Spain but toward all white men, with gravity and dignity and without servility or recourse to that impenetrable wall of ready and easy mirth which negroes sustain between themselves and white men, bearing himself toward his cousin McCaslin not only as one man to another but as an older man to a younger. (170)

Throughout the novel, however, Ike attributes Sam's sense of autonomy not to his individual strengths but to the "chief's blood in him" (168) which overcomes the black and white blood with which it is mixed. Ike cannot see Sam as an individual because--despite his various claims to the contrary--he cannot finally escape those cultural stereotypes which he retains from his white identity.

In "The Bear," Faulkner underscores Ike's bond with Sam in his use of sexual imagery to describe their relationship. If Ike has been initiated into the wilderness in "The Old People," he comes to sexual maturity in his union with Sam in "The Bear":

the surrey itself seemed to have ceased to move. . . as a small solitary boat hangs in lonely immobility, merely tossing up and down, in the infinite waste of the ocean while the water and then the apparently impenetrable land which it nears without appreciable progress, swings slowly and opens the widening inlet which is the anchorage. He entered it. Sam was waiting, wrapped in a quilt on the wagon seat behind the patient and steaming mules. He entered his novitiate to the true wilderness with Sam beside him as he had begun his apprenticeship in miniature to manhood after the rabbits and such with Sam beside him, the two of them wrapped in the damp, warm, negro-rank quilt while the wilderness closed behind his entrance as it had opened momentarily to accept him. . . . (195)

The imagery of the passage makes for strong support for Leslie Fiedler's argument in "Come Back to the Raft Agin, Huck Honey!" that such relationships are homosexual "marriages" joined in order that the white character may atone for his guilt over the white persecution of peoples of color. From the "infinite waste of the ocean" which Ike associates here with the surrey and with white culture, he penetrates the "true wilderness" secure in his bond with Sam under the "negro-rank quilt." Faulkner emphasizes the sexual nature of Ike's bonding with Sam in the subsequent paragraph, in which it occurs to Ike that he is "witnessing his own birth." It is a birth outside the ideology of white

cultural hegemony, within the wilderness, and, ironically, Sam Fathers is both mother and lover.

Ike's relationship with Sam, unlike Huck's relationship with Jim, leads to a sense of purpose from which Ike will not immediately retreat. If in the wilderness Ike decides to "go to hell," to reject that within his white society which is oppressive, he does not, like Huck, recoil from acting upon this decision. His eventual repudiation of his inheritance results directly from the moral imperatives which he has learned from Sam Fathers. Unlike Huck Finn, Ike is able to act upon such imperatives, but, as we will see, Ike will not maintain his stance invariably.

When he discovers the ledgers which reveal to him the atrocities of slavery under his grandfather, Old McCaslin, Ike realizes that they "contained a chronological and much more comprehensive though doubtless tedious record than he would ever get from any other source" (268). He recognizes that the ledgers document the history of "his people," by which he means both white and black. Yet because of the development he has experienced in his relationship with Sam, Ike recognizes too that Old McCaslin has betrayed the land by claiming ownership over it. Ike's rejection of such claims--claims he associates with white identity--is underscored by his recognition of the land's ability to subdue racial differences: the ledgers are the record of "the land which they had all held and used in common and fed

from and on and would continue to use in common without regard to color or titular ownership" (268). Ike is further appalled upon learning of Old McCaslin's sexual relationships with the plantation slaves. As a result of his discoveries, Ike repudiates his inheritance, ostensibly forming the final break with his white culture, and he endeavors to repay money owed the black descendants of Old McCaslin.

Like Huck, Ike comes to grave doubts about his southern society, and these doubts lead him to attempt to right the wrongs of that society. Yet his efforts, like those of Twain's protagonist, are finally suspect because of his own ambiguous position within that society. When Ike travels to Alabama to return money to Tennie, a daughter and granddaughter of Old McCaslin, Tennie's husband rebuffs him. Ike attempts to convince Tennie's husband to take the money so that they may leave the South forever, but Ike's efforts reveal his ultimate reservations concerning racial parity:

'Don't you see?' he cried. 'Don't you see? This whole land, the whole South, is cursed, and all of us who derive from it, whom it ever suckled, white and black both, lie under the curse? Granted that my people brought the curse onto the land: maybe for that reason their descendants alone can--not resist it, not combat it--maybe just endure and outlast it until the curse is lifted. Then your peoples' turn will come because we have forfeited ours. But not now. Not yet. Don't you see?' (278)

As we will see in Intruder in the Dust, such passages are typical of Faulkner. Each time Faulkner's white characters come to a sense of the justice of racial equality, that

recognition serves only to make them more keenly aware of the impossibility of any such equality in the present South, a position closely resembling that which Faulkner himself asserted.

In the final story of Go Down, Moses in which Ike figures, "Delta Autumn," his symbolic rejection of Sam Fathers and his return to a patriarchal position within Yoknapatawpha society becomes complete. Fragile and aging, Ike returns to the woods to hunt with his cousin Roth and others. Too feeble to go out on the hunt one morning, he meets Roth's black mistress who comes looking for Roth because she is pregnant with his child. After speaking with her for some time, Ike finally realizes that she is not white: "Maybe in a thousand or two thousand years in America, he thought. But not now! Not now!" He cried, not loud, in a voice of amazement, pity, and outrage: 'You're a nigger!'" (361). Thus by the end of the novel Ike has become an apologist for the southern patriarchy. His assertion parallels Huck's assessment that Jim was "white inside," for, like Huck, Ike cannot accept a black person within his white society. Finally he sends the woman away: "'Then go,' he said. Then he cried out again in that thin not loud grieving voice: 'Get out of here! I can do nothing for you! Cant nobody do nothing for you!'" (361). Yet he cannot allow her to leave with nothing more than that between them: "'Wait,' he said. She paused again,

obediently still, turning. He took up the sheaf of banknotes and laid it on the blanket at the foot of the cot and drew his hand back beneath the blanket. 'There,' he said" (361). Like the payment that Tom Sawyer makes to Jim, Ike's act here is manipulative, an apology for the guilt he feels. Ironically, Ike, who has rejected materialism throughout his life in large part because of his relationship with Sam Fathers, can offer no more than money.

When Roth's mistress tells Ike that she will return to the North, he quickly encourages her:

"That's right. Go back North. Marry: a man of your own race. That's the only salvation for you --- for a while yet, maybe a long while yet. We will have to wait. Marry a black man. You are young, handsome, almost white; you could find a black man who would see in you what it was you saw in him, who would ask nothing of you and expect less and get even still less than that, if it's revenge you want. The you will forget all this, forget it ever happened, that he ever existed --" until he could stop it at last and did, sitting there in his huddle of blankets during the instant when, without moving at all, she blazed down silently at him. Then that was gone too. She stood in the gleaming and still dripping slicker; looking quietly down at him from under the sodden hat.

"Old man," she said, "have you lived so long and forgotten so much that you don't remember anything you ever knew or felt or even heard about love?" (363)

Ike sends the woman away from the South, for he is no longer able to conceive of the possibility of relationships between black and white. If, as a young man, he had been closer to Sam Fathers than anyone else, he now rejects the possibility for such rapport across racial lines. Here, of course, he is rejecting as well the possibility of a romantic relationship between Roth and the woman, but he is

duplicitous even in this: even as he sends the woman away he claims for himself an enlightened perspective. "We will have to wait," he says, as though his waiting involves a grief similar to hers. The moment is an ironic reversal of the earlier bonding between Ike and Sam Fathers, and yet the woman's rebuke recognizes Ike's hypocrisy. In her recognition we see Faulkner implicitly criticizing the return to stereotype to which he has guided his white character.

For a second time in Ike's life, his moral guide is black, yet here he is unable to respond as he had earlier to Sam Fathers. Instead, he now rejects the lessons which the woman purports to teach him and sends her off. If, as he claimed earlier in the text, "Sam Fathers set me free," Ike has at the end of the novel returned to the white society from which he was set free. While he sheds the white man's burden--the notion of paternal relationship with blacks which comes with land ownership--at the beginning in his relationship with Sam Fathers, he takes it back upon himself here in sending the woman north, assuming a paternal control over her which he had earlier denied himself.

iv

In Intruder in the Dust (1948), Faulkner directly addresses the plight of blacks in the modern South, and, as

in Go Down, Moses, he does so in a novel in which an adolescent male protagonist looks to an older man of mixed race as an acolyte to higher consciousness. At the outset of the novel, all of Yoknapatawpha County believes that Lucas Beauchamp, a character of Indian and African blood who offers a clear parallel to Sam Fathers, has killed Vinson Gowrie. Gowrie, a white man, comes from Beat Four, a section of the county into which the only stranger to enter "with impunity was God and He only by daylight and on Sunday" (36). Nearly everyone in the county believes that Beauchamp, a proud and steadfastly independent anomaly in the white community's understanding of blacks and mulattoes, will soon be hanged by Gowrie's rough-hewn kin, since such is the certain fate of a black man accused of murdering a white man in Mississippi at mid-century.

Charles "Chick" Mallison, Jr., Faulkner's young protagonist, has known Lucas for some time prior to his arrest: when Chick fell into a frozen creek years earlier, Lucas rescued him with a sense of reservation that maddened Chick. As he now watches Lucas being taken into the town jail, Chick remembers crawling up the bank of the creek

until he saw two feet in gum boots which were neither Edmonds' boy's nor Aleck Sander's and then the legs, the overalls rising out of them and he climbed on and stood up and saw a Negro man with an axe on his shoulder, in a heavy sheep-lined coat and a broad pale felt hat such as his grandfather had used to wear, looking at him and that was when he saw Lucas Beauchamp for the first time because you don't forget Lucas Beauchamp; gasping, shaking and only now feeling the shock of the cold water, he looked up at the face which

was just watching him without pity commiseration or anything else, not even surprise. . . . (6)

Lucas, as a black savior, both delivers and baptizes Chick, and in the process he effectively counters Chick's assumptions about blacks by being neither obsequious nor submissive. Chick in turn attempts to force Lucas into a subservient role in their relationship. He insists, for instance, on paying Lucas for his services, but his efforts are to no avail: Lucas refuses such payment, thus maintaining his own autonomous stance within this southern society. Just such a stance landed him in jail, of course, and Chick will have to grant it to Lucas if he is to separate himself from the white community symbolized by Gowrie on the one hand and Chick's patrician uncle, Gavin Stevens, on the other.

Watching the jail which Lucas has entered, Chick recalls the times since Lucas rescued him that the two have met on the street. Each time their meetings are convivial until once when "Lucas looked straight at him, straight into his eyes from five feet away and passed him and he [Chick] thought He has forgotten me. He doesn't even remember me anymore" (24). When Chick learns from his uncle that Lucas's wife Molly had died just before this meeting, Chick sees Lucas in human terms for the first time: "That was why he didn't see me . . . thinking with a kind of amazement: He was grieving. You don't have to be not a nigger in order to grieve" (24-25). Chick's epiphany parallels the epiphanies

which Huck experiences upon the river after deceiving Jim in the fog passage and later when he realizes that Jim grieves for the wife and children he has left behind. Like Huck, Chick here assumes that his black mentor has no experience beyond that which the two of them share--thus his surprise at Lucas' apparent ability to forget him--or, at best, Chick assumes that Lucas's other experiences carry no emotional weight.

Yet if Chick has previously removed Lucas from stereotype, he demonstrates a vengeful desire, shortly after seeing him taken into the jail, to return him to that stereotype. "Your friend Beauchamp seems to have done it this time," Gavin Stevens says to Chick, who responds, "Yes. . . They're going to make a nigger out of him once in his life anyway'" (31-32). Having been humbled when Lucas steadfastly refused to take money for rescuing Chick, Chick is now anxious for a measure of revenge as the novel opens, despite his earlier acknowledgment of Lucas's individuality.

Coming with his uncle to the jail, Chick is surprised to see Lucas asleep in the cell: "He's just a nigger after all for his high nose and his stiff neck and his gold watch-chain and refusing to mean mister to anybody even when he says it" (58), he concludes. And he continues his assessment by heaping further stereotypes upon Lucas: "Only a nigger could kill a man, let alone shoot him in the back, and then sleep like a baby as soon as he found something

flat enough to lie down on" (58). Yet despite his desire to return Lucas to a stereotyped position--a desire he contends throughout the novel--Chick is never fully able to do so.

From jail, Lucas has specific plans for Chick. Recalling the favor that the boy owes him, Lucas asks Chick to dig up Vinson Gowrie's body to prove that Lucas did not murder Gowrie. From this point in the novel forward, Intruder in the Dust becomes a detective story with a goodly measure of race consciousness mixed in. When Chick and his young black friend Aleck Sander dig up the grave, they discover that Lucas in fact did not kill Gowrie. In the course of this discovery, Chick gains respect for Lucas despite Lucas's cool detachment and authoritative stance against all people of the county, black and white.

The parallels between Intruder in the Dust and Huckleberry Finn are many. Indeed, Intruder can be read as a supplanted ending for Twain's novel, appearing as it did at the beginning of the great critical controversy over Twain's much-maligned conclusion. In the final third of Huck Finn, Huck and Tom set out under vastly different pretenses to free Jim from slavery. For Huck, Jim's enslavement is morally wrong, if only because he has found such a subservient friend in Jim. As we have seen, Tom Sawyer has no such moral dilemma; Tom knows that Jim's continued enslavement is illegal because Miss Watson has

freed her slave in her will, giving Tom free rein to manipulate both Jim and Huck into performing the elaborate evasion. Likewise, in Intruder in the Dust, two boys--one black and one white--set out to free a black man, Lucas Beauchamp, who, like Jim, has been wrongly imprisoned. Chick's friend Aleck Sander, however, is no practical joker like Tom Sawyer: Aleck Sander is instead very much immersed in Lucas' plight, fearing as he does that he may be punished by white lynch mobs simply for being out on the street in the midst of the white community's anger. Rather than reducing the black character to a freedom gained at the hands of playful adolescents, as Twain does, Faulkner here empowers Lucas by portraying his sense of autonomy within an oppressive white culture. And it is this autonomy that Chick questions throughout.

Chick looks to Gavin Stevens for paternal guidance, and Stevens repeatedly encourages Chick to stereotype Lucas. Stevens is the one character here who speaks lucidly and at length about racial conflict in the South, yet his views, like Faulkner's, are clearly patriarchal in nature. He sees himself as a great white father, and he expects Chick to inherit such a status. Chick, of course, is caught between a white world represented by Stevens and a black one represented by Lucas. Stevens develops into a figure typical of southern fiction in his lengthy and duplicitous pronouncements on race, a figure dating back to Alfred St.

Clare in Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin. Like St. Clare before him, and like Harper Lee's Atticus Finch to follow, Stevens's character is fraught with contradiction. Even as he claims to represent a reasoned view of southern race relations, we see the inherent racism in that view.

Stevens' pronouncements on race are at the center of the novel, and, while maintaining great distance from Lucas, he nevertheless does what he can to save him from the hands of the angry lynch mob. Upon his arrival at the jail, Stevens the patriarch confronts Lucas with both advice and reprimand: "'Lucas,' he said, 'has it ever occurred to you that if you just said mister to white people and said it like you meant it, you might not be sitting here now?'" (62). Lucas's response characterizes the autonomous stance he takes throughout the novel: "So I'm to commence now," Lucas said. 'I can start off by saying mister to the folks that drags me out of here and builds a fire under me'" (62). Lucas's irony in the situation reflects the independence which he will maintain throughout the novel. Through his irony, Lucas depicts the hypocrisy of genuflecting before men such as the lynch mob which he awaits.

Like Huck Finn caught between white and black worlds, Chick vacillates between the two figures of his uncle and Lucas Beauchamp. In listening to his uncle, Chick envisions a view of southern race relations which he must balance against his own practical experience. Stevens maintains

that white southerners "must resist the North" because they must retain the right to set blacks ("Sambo") free in their own time. "It will have to be us," he claims, to free blacks so that "someday Lucas Beauchamp can shoot a white man in the back with the same impunity to lynch-rope or gasoline as a white man" and vote wherever he likes and send his children to any school he chooses. "But it wont be next Tuesday," he concludes, despite what people in the North might think, who have forgotten "that Lucas Beauchamp's master was not merely beaten to his knees but trampled for ten years on his face in the dust to make him swallow it" (189). The power that Gavin Stevens claims must be retained for southern whites is of course the same that antebellum southern whites claimed in order to maintain the cultural hegemony under which blacks were obligated to whites for any freedoms which they obtain.

The 'intruder in the dust' in the novel is of course Chick, who intrudes into not only Gowrie's grave but also into the weight of southern history and southern race relations. As many critics have suggested, the character of Gavin Stevens is in large part a mouthpiece for Faulkner's own views on the burgeoning civil rights movement and the resistance it met with among white southerners. But if Stevens speaks largely for Faulkner, Faulkner nonetheless creates Chick, who finally cannot bring himself to accept

fully the patriarchal beliefs which his uncle espouses. Chick's presence at the center of the racial strife portrayed in the novel ensures that the point of view throughout will remain firmly in the hands of the character who most closely resembles Huck Finn.

At the conclusion of the novel, Lucas insists on paying for Gavin and Chick's services, asserting his independent position relative to their white society. This directly contrasts with the conclusion of Huckleberry Finn, in which Tom Sawyer pays Jim forty dollars for his inconvenience and Jim joyfully celebrates wealth regained. Still, however, Faulkner's novel ends in stasis: given a choice between a role as a white patriarch in his society and a role as one who overcomes the stereotyping of the black community necessitated by patriarchal condescension, Chick finally cannot act. Like Huck he is primarily an observer. If Huck Finn lights out for the Territory rather than confront the imperatives of his own conscience, Chick Mallison is equally passive in his inability to take a stance in his southern society.

iv

"Going North, there is a discriminatory tariff on the heart," (xxi) Elizabeth Spencer wrote in an introduction to a 1965 edition of The Voice at the Back Door (1956). She

added that, while living in Italy (as she was when writing the novel), she found it "very exciting to write about the South" because, from that distance, "the outlines of [the issue of race] stood out very clearly in my mind" (xviii). In explaining just what became clear for her, she revealed the patriarchal attitude which she held toward blacks in the South:

I missed Negroes. If you have always lived where half the population is black (at least half, for I knew far more Negroes than white people until I got sent to school), then when you leave that, you feel the world is lacking something, and then you know you are wishing to see black skins around. Somehow one never imagined that there would come a time when they wouldn't be there. To write in this book about as many Negroes as I thought I could convincingly imagine was a way of being with them. I liked writing those parts (xviii).

Spencer's language here reveals the stereotypes implicit in her novel. She missed not individuals but "Negroes," a mass of men and women cast in a vastly inferior position to Spencer as she grew up among them. Despite Spencer's declaration of such racial nostalgia, however, she develops upon Twain's pattern in significant ways in The Voice at the Back Door, particularly in her portrayal of a black character in an autonomous stance relative to southern whites. Like William Faulkner, Spencer undermines the literary stereotypes of the South even as she employs them to structure her novel.

The Voice at the Back Door closely parallels Faulkner's Intruder in the Dust in its consideration of the plight of a black man in a small southern town at mid-century. Spencer's

novel opens with the death of Travis Brevard, sheriff of Lacey, Mississippi: Brevard comes to Duncan Harper's grocery store to die because he is as unwilling to have his wife "spread me out on a pink bedspread and stick a thermometer in my mouth" (9) as he is to embarrass Ida Belle, his "nigger woman," by leaving her to arrange for his corpse. Brevard's last wish is that Harper, a former star running back and local hero, take over the duties of the sheriff's office. Brevard exemplifies the old order of the South, as we see in his illicit relationship with Ida Belle and in his quiet acceptance of protection money from the local bootleggers. Brevard's death exposes the roots of Lacey's racial identity, when Duncan immediately begins to campaign for sheriff promising racial equality and an end to the bootlegging.

Set in the early 1950s, the plot centers upon the tensions of racial conflict in the rural South, symbolized by the two men who vie to succeed Brevard: Duncan Harper, who as acting sheriff finds himself embroiled in a bitter fight to rid Winfield County of a bootlegging operation owned in part by Harper's friend Jimmy Tallant, and Willard Follansbee, a candidate who will blindly support the bootlegging operation and who fervently embraces segregation. The rivalry between Harper and Jimmy Tallant develops in Harper's campaign for sheriff: Harper's benign attitude toward blacks, in combination with his opposition

to bootlegging, threaten to cost him the election. In the midst of the controversy is Beckwith Dozer, a black man whose autonomous position in Lacey society enflames the racial consciousness of the town. Dozer, like Lucas Beauchamp in Intruder, acts as a catalyst for each of the principal events of the novel.

Duncan Harper's relationship with Beck Dozer closely parallels the relationship which Twain establishes between Huck and Jim. Harper first encounters Dozer shortly after Travis Brevard has died. Dozer fears that his son, W.B., will lose his job carrying groceries at Harper's store for having run from the store as Sheriff Brevard was dying, and he seeks out Harper to make certain this will not happen. Just as important to Dozer, though, is determining whether Harper intends to run for sheriff himself. "It's no business of yours" (18), Harper replies to the question. Not easily put off, Dozer responds that his "acquaintance is not cultivated" because, as a black man in the South, he lacks a vote. As the two stand, ironically, in the county courthouse, Harper for the first time finds himself confronted with the question of racial equality by a black man, and, despite his own like sentiments, he attempts to rid himself of Dozer by evoking a stereotyped response: "That kind of talk's no good, he seemed to be merely remarking. On your way, boy" (19).

Yet Dozer will not be denied and here forces Harper to see him (Dozer) as an individual by declaring his own name and tying it to his father's murder:

The Negro withdrew from the shadow of the big white man, but he was still erect when he stopped in the door and said, "My name is Beckwith Dozer, Mister Harper. When I was a small child, my father was shot to death upstairs in this courthouse. I never been inside here before tonight."

"Oh, I see." Their eyes met and though they were alone in an empty building, and no one knew they were there, it seemed that the world listened, that a new way of speaking was about to form in an old place. They were a little helpless, too, like children waiting to be prompted. What should the words be? (19)

Unable to find the words, nor indeed this new identity they seek, Harper and Dozer part, but not before Dozer wishes Harper luck in the campaign for sheriff. Harper is left savoring Dozer's words "like the taste of something new, trying to decide if they mocked him, or spoke sincerely, but he could not" (19).

The mistrust between the two coincides with that between Faulkner's characters in Intruder in the Dust; like Faulkner and Twain, Spencer clearly conceives of her text as a political tract as the relationship in the novel between black man and white develops. Indeed, like Faulkner before her, she portrays the confrontation between black and white as a dance equally mixed in enmity and dependency. For Spencer, the relationship can advance only through an elaborate structure of deception and manipulation. Here, as in Intruder, the pair cannot gain even an outward sense of accommodation such as that we see in Twain's novel. Each of

these southern novels turns upon this mistrust, though, unlike Twain, Faulkner and Spencer are careful not to mystify the relationship with sentiment: in both Intruder and The Voice at the Back Door, the reader, like the antagonists, must confront the awkwardness of the relationship between black and white characters.

Harper's next encounter with Beck Dozer, which lends the novel its title, occurs when Dozer comes to Harper's back door and requests protection from the white man he claims to have been fighting:

The Negro had not knocked, but had stood saying, "Mister Harper? Mister Harper?" over and over, and now that they [Harper and his wife] saw him it seemed they had heard him for certain all the time, for no telling how long, for it is part of the consciousness of a southern household that a Negro is calling at the back door in the night. (90)

Dozer claims to have been fighting with Bud Grantham, a local bootlegger, over a bottle of whiskey. Harper believes that Dozer would have been better off to get out of town completely, considering Grantham's violent disposition, but Dozer plays upon Harper's liberal sentiments so that Harper will instead agree to custody protection: "If a Negro never takes advantage of what legal rights are open to him, he can't hope to enjoy those that ought to be open and ain't. You are the law, Mister Harper. I have come to you" (93). Dozer, like Spencer, plays upon the literary stereotype of the white saint in order to convince Harper to help him, and Harper agrees to take Dozer into custody in the small jail

downtown. When they arrive there, Harper waits inside the jail with Dozer.

Waiting together in the jail cell, Dozer tells Harper that he is either "the only white man around with principles, or everybody else is stitching their principles together out of a different bolt of goods" (111). Dozer's apparent faith in Duncan Harper arouses in both Harper and the reader a sympathetic response. Yet, here, as opposed to parallel situations in both Huck Finn and Intruder in the Dust, there is little or nothing at stake: we soon find that Dozer's dilemma is actually a ruse formed so that Jimmy Tallant and other political opponents of Harper's can photograph Harper defending Dozer in the jail. They will then portray him publicly as a defender of equal rights for blacks, a stance sure to lose Harper the election. Dozer has been paid to act out this scene with Harper; thus, the voice at the back door, in this case, is completely unreliable. Harper, like the reader, has been duped by a faith in the literary stereotypes established in the earlier novel. Spencer undercuts the Huck-Jim relationship through Dozer's complete lack of reliability: he pretends to admire Harper but of course he does so only on the dole.

But it is precisely because Dozer is so wholly unreliable here in the early sections of the novel that the emotional entreaties of the narrator fall flat: the narrator's assertion that the white southerner has a moral

obligation to blacks tugging at the edge of his/her conscience ("...it is part of the consciousness of a southern household that a Negro is calling at the back door in the night" [90]) is undermined by her subsequent portrayal of Beck Dozer as suspect and hypocritical.

Spencer directly parodies Faulkner's representations of racial conflict in Intruder in the Dust in her novel, finally emphasizing not Dozer's dependence upon the white community but rather his ability to successfully manipulate it. Dozer's request for custody here and the consequent confrontation with the lynching party recall Lucas Beauchamp's dilemma in Intruder. Further, Harper's reassurance to his friend Kerney Woolbright that Dozer will not be lynched overtly refers to the literary stereotypes employed by white southern writers such as Faulkner and Erskine Caldwell in portraying racial hostility:

"It's raining too hard to lynch a nigger. It's too cold."

"It's what?"

"It's the wrong time of year, too. These things are supposed to happen in the middle of September after it hasn't rained for forty weeks, after all the cattle have died of thirst and their stench rolls in from the country and there's so much dust the sun looks bloody all day long. Isn't that right?"

"I never did either," said Kerney. "All I know is what I read in William Faulkner" (101).

Duncan's irony undermines the gravity of the predicament that he and Woolbright face. Peggy Whitman Prenshaw suggests that this scene exemplifies the manner in which Spencer "co-opts the Faulkner presence by dramatizing it as

a force within the novel [Voice] itself" (64). Spencer is thus able to employ the motifs of southern literature even as she maintains an ironic distance from them. In laying the ground for southern literary stereotyping, Spencer takes care to lay it with the mines of irony. She deliberately upsets literary stereotypes of race, at every turn upsetting the reader's expectations.

After the jail house photographs appear in northern newspapers sympathetic to civil rights, Duncan Harper's campaign for sheriff is apparently lost, and he must attempt to salvage it by enticing Dozer to publicly admit to his participation in the ruse. Dozer initially rejects Harper's plea despite Harper's apparently liberal agenda:

"You've seen a light these days," Harper went on. "All of you have. You keep casting around for the best way. You want to deal equally with white men but you don't know who to trust. You'd rather have Mr. Willard Follansbee in office instead of me?"

"To be honest with you, Mister Harper, I prefer the status quo. You can climb the status quo like a step ladder with two feet on the floor, but trying to trail along behind a white man of good will is like following along behind somebody on a tightrope. As he gets along towards the middle his problems are likely to increase, and soon he gots to turn loose of me to help himself" (137).

Beck Dozer is unable to disregard the personal investment that Harper has in attempting to gain Dozer's assistance, and here Spencer acknowledges the ephemeral nature of the Huck-Jim relationship. Though Duncan Harper and Beck Dozer ultimately enter into just such a relationship, they do so

only after fully recognizing the extent to which their association is the result of their separate machinations.

Once they do recognize the extent to which they have been manipulating one another, however, both men find comfort in a shared sense of dependence. Symbolic of their recognition of this dependence is their examination of the library of texts in Latin which Dozer's father inherited from a Senator Upinshaw, the first white man in Lacey to demonstrate a genuine concern for blacks. They enter the library declaring their openness to one another: "You are the first white man I ever showed the inside to," Dozer says, and Harper replies that Dozer is "the first Negro I ever invited to my house" (139). Yet Dozer is still reluctant to help Harper expose how Jimmy Tallant got the picture in the jail:

He turned finally to Harper. "I tell you, Mister Harper, you are the only white man to see inside my papa's school, but Mister Jimmy Tallant knows its there because he asked me once what it was.... Mister Tallant and I, were yoked up together, you might say. There isn't anything one of us thinks that the other hasn't thought too. They say a nigger's got to belong to some white man."

"You believe that?"

"No," said Dozer, and sighed.

"I won't force you to come," said Harper, "or pay you anything for doing it."

"Lord knows the Granthams will have my hide on the door before night come, if I do this."

"I count on Mr. Tallant," said Harper, "I don't think he'll let them hurt you."

"You don't *think*! It's not you, it's me!"

"It might be me! It could be me! Don't you know it might come to that?"

"All right then. I'll come."

When the gate stood between them again, Dozer asked him, "Why you wants to act like this, Mister Harper?"

and one of his dark cheeks gleamed wet, smeared down from the gold rim of his glasses lens.

"No reason," Harper returned. "I want to do what's right, I guess. That's all." (139-140)

Harper here offers Dozer his 'freedom' from Jimmy Tallant, and the passage recalls Huck's decision to "go to hell" and set Jim free from slavery. Like Huck, Duncan Harper here takes on apparent risks of his own, and, also like Huck, who can't stand the gnawing pangs of conscience which hound him as he contemplates sending his letter to Miss Watson, Harper stands to gain from his decision. Where Huck's compensation is psychological, Duncan's is material: he has no other option if he wishes to be elected sheriff. And it is not until Harper makes his own risk apparent that Dozer is willing to accept Harper's offer. Both characters come to link their separate causes here only after having recognized the risk which each of them takes in doing so.

Despite their scheming, Spencer explicitly attempts to portray the scene as a moment of transcendence for both men. If, like Huck (and like Mrs. Stowe), Harper acknowledges here that he simply wants to do "what's right," Dozer's agreement is an acknowledgment of his need to escape the yoke of tradition. And yet, in the midst of this unburdening of guilt, Spencer willfully employs stereotypical language in describing Beck Dozer's son as "a savage" immediately prior to this passage. Traditions have a way of maintaining themselves: the stereotyped ideology implied in such a description undermines Spencer's attempt

here to shed this scene of the irony which pervaded the earlier scene in the jailhouse.

Spencer's achievements in The Voice at the Back Door are many: like Faulkner, she recognizes a complexity in her black characters that Twain could not, and each of her primary characters is wrought with ambiguity and self-contradiction. The central pattern in the novel, however, in which Harper and Dozer come to see each other as individuals caught in a typed society (and, indeed, a typed genre), is undermined in the final third of the novel by the stereotypes which Spencer employs in portraying blacks. She makes frequent reference to the "savage" nature of the blacks (a nature that, for Spencer, blacks struggle to overcome yet are finally chained to) in this section of her novel, even as she attempts to demonstrate the ways in which whites and blacks can benefit from interdependence.

When Willard Follansbee, the candidate opposing Harper in the race for sheriff, rapes Dozer's wife, Lucy, Spencer writes only of Lucy's "savage instinct" (232) and not of any such instinct on Follansbee's part: "Lucy turned her head aside. She was conscious of the white man's slack jaw where the stiff black hair roots were visible like punctures and the breath moved in and out. She went dull all over, animal, African, obedient to the whip" (230). As Lucy returns to her home after the rape, Spencer addresses her white reader in a lengthy passage which ties Lucy (and the

rape) to the experience of all blacks in the South, suggesting that Follansbee's brutality is somehow necessary to the white man's "will to survive:"

Black people are night people, and you do not drive a southern road at any unearthly hour without seeing them along the roadsides, going somewhere, or marking at a distance across the field the oil lamp burning full wick within the cabin. Sometimes, passing near a cabin that is totally dark as though for sleep, one hears break out again the low mingling of many voices; no crisis has brought them there, but the instinctive motion of their strange society has behaved like a current deep down in the river, and here they are. Savage, they came to a savage land. White people, already appalled by floods and rattlesnakes, malaria, swamps, tornadoes, mud, ice, sunstroke, and typhoid fever, felt compelled to levee out the black with the same ruthless patience with which they levied the Mississippi River. They were driven to do what they did, not by any conviction of right or wrong, but by the simple will to survive. Meanwhile, Negroes married the land. Its image is never complete without them; if they are out of the picture, they are only just around the corner, coming or going, or both. They are not really as afraid in the night as most white people are. Whiteness is a kind of nakedness to the dark world, and Lucy, who had all the fear she could do with, went to no trouble to imagine more. She moved on in her blackness, and her heart, sick and numb, burned tender as the eye of a night creature, alive in the dark. (235)

The authorial aside reveals the depths of Spencer's own primitivist perspective, an ideological position much more within the culture she critiques than outside it: Spencer appears to be informed more by Thomas Dixon, Jr. than Mark Twain in such descriptions of blacks. In addressing "the instinctive motion of their strange society," Spencer directly confronts the racial issues at the heart of her novel, yet she does so in a manner which links her to the very prejudices and stereotypes she ostensibly sets out to

right. She is finally unable to enter the perspective of the black characters she portrays and thus they remain figments of her white imagination.

With Duncan Harper, Jimmy Tallant shares a sense of obligation to Beck Dozer. If Harper is linked to Dozer through a vague sense of guilt and moral responsibility, however, Tallant is inextricably tied to Beck Dozer ("Mister Tallant and I, were yoked up together, you might say.") for more explicit reasons. It was Tallant's father who brutally murdered Dozer's father, Robinson Dozer, along with eleven other black citizens of Lacey, in the courthouse thirty years before the action of the novel takes place. This event is still very much a part of the consciousness of Lacey, and the bond between Dozer and Tallant is one which, like that between Harper and Dozer, is bound up in both resentment and need. Dozer recognizes the significance of the bond in telling Harper: "Mister Tallant and I are tied together on account of what his daddy did to mine. He wouldn't lose me, nor let me come to harm for anything in this world. He's my main protection in this life (136)." The link between the two men exemplifies the relationship of white community to black in the modern South: Tallant provides "protection" for Dozer against the ill will of other white men in order to expiate past sins.

Not long after the ruse at the jail house, Beck Dozer finds himself in a predicament much more dire. Jimmy

Tallant is shot by men from outside the county who are attempting to take a stake in Tallant's bootlegging operation by lending money to Willard Follansbee's election campaign. When the white community blames Dozer for the shooting, his only alternative is to run. With the election drawing near, frustration in the county runs high because Harper has failed to apprehend Dozer, and Willard Follansbee exploits Harper's inability to capture Dozer. On the eve of the election, as the candidates give their campaign speeches, Harper gets word from Dozer's nephew that Dozer is ready to come in to jail. Harper races away to get Dozer before a lynch mob can reach him. In the process, he defends Dozer against two men who want "to scare the hell out of him" (334) to prove to him that blacks are not equal to whites." When Harper defends Dozer, the men turn the brunt of their anger on Harper:

The two men did not want to give ground.

"I hear you're against segregation, want to let the niggers vote," said the tall one. "Is that right?"

Duncan flushed. "Why don't you go to the speaking and hear what I've got to say?"

"Why should I if you can tell me yes or no right now? Do you or don't you?"

"I haven't got time to waste on you," Duncan said.

"Waste (*Spencer's italics*) on us? You don't talk much like a politician to me. You ask for our vote and you're talking like that?"

"You can vote for whoever you want to," said Duncan.

"The way you're talking, I wouldn't want to claim you on my side." (334)

Having defended Dozer earlier to no avail because Dozer was never truly in danger, he proves himself an ally yet again. He is however, a martyr for the cause: Harper dies when he

wrecks his car while being pursued by the lynch mob on the way to town.

At the novel's conclusion, for all the action of the novel, little has changed: Harper symbolically sacrifices himself for the cause of racial equality but it is an empty act and one that, apparently, will effect no change. Jimmy Tallant leads Dozer through the angry mob surrounding the wreck near the end of the novel, but he has never done less: Tallant is once again Dozer's "main protection in life." This fact betrays the apparent intention of the author to reveal growth in the course of the novel rather than stagnation. As in Huckleberry Finn, the role of the white saint is first and foremost to serve--however tenuous or deceptive such service might be--as martyr for a cause that is not his own: having done that, no change need be effected.

Like Huckleberry Finn and Intruder in the Dust, and indeed like many of the novels I discuss here, The Voice at the Back Door becomes a modern-day slave narrative in which a black man is unjustly accused of a crime he did not commit. And, as in each of the novels by white authors I'm discussing, the black character here is shown to be dependent upon the generosity of the white community and upon one white character in particular. Unlike his first request for protection from Duncan Harper, the stakes for Beck Dozer at the novel's end are real and Dozer's

relationship with Harper becomes critical for both men. Dozer depends upon Harper's patronage for his life and Harper is bound to lose his election for sheriff if he is unable to bring Dozer in to prison in order to prove his own innocence.

v

If Faulkner and Spencer employ Twain's model ironically, variously parodying Twain and paralleling him, we see in the next chapter two writers at mid-century, Carson McCullers and Harper Lee, who are more faithful to a southern mythology which Twain, in large measure established.

CHAPTER 3
SURROGATE MOTHERS

i

Carson McCullers, in The Member of the Wedding, and Harper Lee, in To Kill a Mockingbird, adapt Twain's pattern--a developing southern mythology pertaining to race--as they develop their narratives. Both novels portray white girls whose mothers are absent and who look to their black servants for counsel. McCullers, however, equips Frankie Addams's black mentor, Berenice, with a degree of autonomy comparable to that of Faulkner's Lucas Beauchamp, while Lee throughout her novel portrays black characters wholly dependent upon whites and the white community for their existence.

ii

Like Huck Finn, Frankie Addams of Carson McCullers' The Member of the Wedding (1946) seeks a new sense of identity, a theme alluded to in her recurrent name and costume

changes. Because her mother has died and her father increasingly distances himself from her, Frankie ultimately looks to Berenice, her family's black cook, as a moral guide. Ironically, however, even as she clings to Berenice for such guidance, Frankie feels that she must remain aloof from Berenice in order to establish her emerging sense of identity. McCullers thus establishes Berenice as a moral standard, and Frankie's repeated attempts to escape the black world which Berenice represents--and her repeated returns to that world--give shape and focus to her ultimate identity. In her romantic notions of joining her older brother and his new wife on their honeymoon, she believes that she has found a path which will lead her to maturity and away from the childhood world which she associates with Berenice and with black identity. When Berenice cautiously tries to dissuade Frankie from her plan, Frankie suspects her of being jealous.

Frankie sees Berenice in various white stereotypes of blacks: as Margaret McDowell argues, for Frankie, Berenice is variously "affectionate or stern mother, the primitive seer, and the black queen who once lived with her dream lover" (81). Berenice, however, refuses to accept such stereotypes for herself, and she attempts to compel Frankie to look upon her as an individual.

The black world dominated by Berenice is, for Frankie, fractured and incomplete and thus is one which accurately

reflects her own state of mind. In her brother's wedding, Frankie seeks a unity beyond her childhood, which is inextricably tied to Berenice. From the opening pages of the novel, Frankie feels ill at ease in the kitchen--"a sad and ugly room" in Frankie's view, covered with her cousin John Henry's "queer child drawings, as far up as his arm could reach" (4)--which is the the one room which she associates directly with Berenice. Thus McCullers associates Berenice with childhood from the beginning of her novel, and as Frankie longs to grow up and out of childhood, she must likewise long to grow out of her relationship with Berenice: the kitchen soon looks for her "like a room in the crazy-house. And now the old kitchen made Frankie sick. The name for what had happened to her Frankie did not know, but she could feel her squeezed heart beating against the table edge" (4). It is a world from which, like Huck, Frankie wishes she "could just light out" (6), yet her apparent reliance upon Berenice leaves her unable to do so. Berenice recognizes Frankie's dilemma throughout, insisting that Frankie confront her own identity: "You jealous [of the wedding]. . . . Go and behold yourself in the mirror. I can see from the color in your eye" (2).

If Berenice encourages Frankie to seek out her own identity, however, Frankie for her part attempts to filter her own experience through Berenice's perspective. Immediately after her brother and his fiance have come to

visit, Frankie asks Berenice to recount the visit for her once again:

"Tell me," she said. "Tell me exactly how it was."

"You know!" said Berenice. "You seen them."

"But tell me," Frankie said. (26)

Berenice interprets Frankie's own experience for her and we see that Frankie feels obligated to channel her experiences through Berenice in order to give them validity. Indeed, Frankie struggles against this desire throughout the novel, coming back time and again to reify her experiences in dialogue with Berenice. "Tell me exactly what did they look like?" (27), Frankie says once Berenice has interpreted the visit for her.

Yet if Frankie requires Berenice's interpretation of such events as they discuss her plans to become "a member of the wedding" and leave with her brother when he marries, she remains somewhat mystified by the black identity she associates with Berenice. When Berenice's son Honey and her suitor T.T. interrupt the discussion and enter the kitchen, Frankie is perplexed by Honey's dialect which glides so easily between white and black. "That sure is a cute suit you got on, Honey," Frankie says to Honey. "Where'd you get it?" But his response leave her alienated from him: "Honey could talk like a white school-teacher; his lavender lips could move as quick and light as butterflies. But he only answered with a colored word, a dark sound from the throat that can mean anything. 'Ahhnnh,' he said" (36). Frankie

is attracted by Honey's contradictions, for he is, like herself and like Berenice, caught between white and black worlds. Similarly, the communion Frankie feels with Berenice and the two men is strong: when the three patiently wait for Frankie to leave so that they can drink whiskey, "She stood in the door and looked at them. She did not want to go away." And yet once Frankie leaves, she is unwilling or unable to trust Berenice not to betray her plan to join the wedding party: "She closed the door, but behind her she could hear their voices. With her head against the kitchen door she could hear the murmuring dark sounds that rose and fell in a gentle way. Ayee--ayee" (36). McCullers emphasizes Frankie's curiosity with black dialect and black culture while further establishing the maternal bond between Frankie and Berenice. The words of the three--"murmuring dark sounds"--nurture rather than threaten Frankie as she listens from behind the door. And yet such nurturing is of course limited: she hears the sounds in such a way only because she is eavesdropping. When Honey asks Berenice what she and Frankie had been discussing, to Frankie's surprise, Berenice does not betray her confidence: "Just foolishness," she says.

Frankie's awareness of Berenice's "otherness" throughout the novel draws her to the older woman: she thinks that "nobody human" (3) would ever know why Berenice chooses to have a blue glass eye, and yet it is just this

lack of unity with which Frankie can identify, being herself "a member of nothing in the world" and "an unjoined person"

(1). And it is ultimately Berenice's blackness with which Frankie can empathize, though she will reject that blackness in attempting to join herself with the white world she comes to envy. Attempting later in the novel to interpret Frankie's distress, Berenice points to the similarities between them:

"We all of us somehow caught. We born this way or that way and we don't know why. But we caught anyhow. I born Berenice. You born Frankie. John Henry born John Henry. And maybe we wants to widen and bust free. But no matter what we do we still caught. Me is me and you is you and he is he. We each one of us somehow caught all by ourself. Is that what you were trying to say?"

"I don't know," F. Jasmine said. "But I don't want to be caught."

"Me neither," said Berenice. "Don't none of us. I'm caught worse than you is."

F. Jasmine understood why she had said this, and it was John Henry who asked in his child voice: "Why?"

"Because I am black," said Berenice. "Because I am colored. Everybody is caught one way or another. But they done drawn completely extra bounds around all colored people. They done squeezed us off in one corner by ourselves. So we caught that firstway I was telling you about. And we caught as colored people also. Sometimes a boy like Honey feel like he just can't breathe no more. He feel like he got to break something or break himself. Sometimes it just about more than we can stand."

"I know it," F. Jasmine said. "I wish Honey could do something."

"He just feels desperate like."

"Yes," F. Jasmine said. "Sometimes I feel like I want to break something, too. I feel like I wish I could just tear down the whole town." (113-114)

In Berenice's assertion that "They done drawn completely extra bounds around all colored people," McCullers asserts her own posture in the narrative, allowing Berenice a voice

free of irony juxtaposed with Frankie's juvenile longings. In her desire "to break something, too," Frankie shares in Berenice's sense of being cast out, despite Berenice's attempts to isolate the black experience as unique. Berenice's assertion that "they done squeezed us off in one corner" only draws Frankie closer, for she herself has a "squeezed heart" (4). Acting as does many a white liberal in such a position, Frankie appropriates Berenice's black identity in attempting to delineate her own life. As Huck Finn joins his cause with Jim's when they leave Jackson's Island ("Git up and hump yourself, Jim. They're after us!"), Frankie here attempts to explain her alienation from white society through Berenice's explanation of racial oppression. Berenice, however, rejects any such yoking: though willing to act as a maternal figure to both Frankie and John Henry, she will not allow either of them free rein over her own experience. McCullers here maintains Berenice's autonomous stance even as Frankie attempts to deprive her of it.

In a subsequent passage, Berenice insists upon Frankie's inability to "pass" as black: she ironically proposes a reversal of racial identity as Frankie attempts to understand why she cannot change her name as she sees fit. "Why is it against the law to change your name?" Frankie asks." Berenice's responds by mocking Frankie's name changes: "Suppose I would suddenly up and call myself

Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt. And you would begin naming yourself Joe Louis. And John Henry would try to pass off as Henry Ford. Now what kind of confusion do you think that would cause?" (107). Berenice's levity here is hardly innocent: the shared racial identity between herself and Frankie which Frankie proposes threatens her and she must insist that no such exchange is possible. She claims her suffering as her own. Just such an exchange will finally lead Frankie to break from Berenice, rejecting the black world which Berenice embodies and casting herself off into a white identity and a white world. Berenice's association of John Henry with Henry Ford is subtle criticism as well: throughout the novel, John Henry acts as an agent provocateur for white identity, a child much closer to Frankie's father in character than to Berenice.

Despite Berenice's various attempts to distance Frankie's experience from her own, Frankie's association of her alienation with that of Berenice, and by extension with the black community in the town, persists throughout the novel. Later in the novel, Frankie, left behind by Berenice, wanders out to John Henry's house, where she tries to communicate with her cousin, to no avail. With dusk falling, she stands apart from John Henry, watching him when a blues horn--"the sad horn of some colored boy" (41) begins to play from "somewhere in town." Despite the fact that she does not know the player, Frankie immediately feels a

kinship with him: "Frankie stood stiff, her head bent and her eyes closed, listening. There was something about the tune that brought back to her all of the spring: flowers, the eyes of strangers, rain." Frankie's experience of listening to the horn player parallels her experience with Berenice. The horn player's music reflects the tangle of her consciousness at this point in the novel and draws her into herself even as she strains to hear. Just as Frankie feels that Berenice shares her sense of fragmentation, she believes the horn player speaks to her in a language that she cannot establish with her cousin. The expression that the "colored boy" gives to his blues brings Frankie to reminisce over the spring, before she felt cast out of childhood, and brings her back to her present--"that long dark season of trouble." And yet, like Berenice, the horn player stops short of offering anything beyond mere association: "Just at the time when the tune should be laid, the music finished, the horn stopped playing." Frankie is left "lost," awaiting guidance that will not come. Finally, Frankie is driven not yet to find her own direction but instead to mimic the black blues that she has heard: in her own blues improvisation, she "began to talk aloud" (42), but pays no attention to her own words.

Bitterly complaining that Berenice refuses to believe that she is leaving town for good--"sometimes I honestly think she is the biggest fool that ever drew breath" (42)--

Frankie suddenly finds direction for herself after listening to the horn player:

"For it was just at that moment that Frankie understood. She knew who she was and how she was going into the world. Her squeezed heart suddenly opened and divided. Her heart divided like two wings. And when she spoke her voice was sure.

"I know where I'm going," she said. (42)

And yet, like Huck Finn so often does, Frankie's resolution fails to yield any definitive action. Because she has decided to set her sights for a white identity and to escape Berenice, her heart is no longer "squeezed" as it had been when her closest association was with Berenice. Having here decided to become "a member of the wedding," she momentarily retreats into childhood and into her dependence upon Berenice.

At dinner soon after Frankie decides to join the wedding party, she questions Berenice about name of her favorite food, hopping-john, apparently reluctant to call it by the name given to it by black southerners now that she plans to join the white world that the wedding offers her:

"Tell me. Is it just us who call this hopping-john? Or is it known by that name through all the country. It seems a strange name somehow."

"Well, I have heard it called various things," said Berenice.

"What?"

"Well, I have heard it called peas and rice. Or rice and peas and pot-liquor. Or hopping john. You can vary and take your pick."

"But I'm not talking about this town," F. Jasmine said. "I mean in other places. I mean through all the world. I wonder what the French call it."

"Oh," said Berenice. "Well, you ask me a question I cannot answer." (80-81)

Berenice, who knows a thing or two about signifiers, dismisses the importance of such transformations of language, in much the same way that she has tried to dissuade Frankie from changing her name to F. Jasmine. As Jim dismisses the reverence due the king and the duke--"dey can't get no situation" (245)--Berenice dismisses Frankie's longing for a more striking name for hopping-john. Frankie, of course, yearns for a name that is less southern (read: black?). "I wonder what the French call it," she wonders of the food that Berenice cooks for her, which, by her own admission, is her preferred dish: "Now hopping-john was F. Jasmine's very favorite food. She had always warned them to wave a plate of rice and peas before her nose when she was in her coffin, to make certain there was no mistake..." (70). In slighting the term "hopping-john," Frankie symbolically rejects the black/southern experience of which Berenice is a constant reminder. "I know where I'm going," Frankie realizes just before the passage, and her chosen destination is the cultivated world which she associates with white identity.

Frankie's distress at her present circumstances increases when Berenice tells her that a change of names is just as illogical as would be a change of race. Circling the kitchen table with a knife in her hand, Frankie is further distracted at her inability to tell Berenice of her

plans to go dancing with a soldier from the Blue Moon.

Berenice finally stops her:

"Set here in my lap," said Berenice. "And rest a minute."

F. Jasmine put the knife on the table and settled down on Berenice's lap. She leaned back and put her face against Berenice's neck; her face was sweaty and Berenice's neck was sweaty also, and they both smelled salty and sour and sharp. Her right leg was flung across Berenice's knee, and it was trembling--but when she steadied her toes on the floor, it did not tremble any more....

F. Jasmine rolled her head and rested her face against Berenice's shoulder. She could feel Berenice's soft big ninnas against her back, and her soft wide stomach, her warm solid legs. She had been breathing very fast, but after a minute her breath had slowed down so that she breathed in time with Berenice; the two of them were close together as one body, and Berenice's stiffened hands were clasped around F. Jasmine's chest. (112-113)

The passage reveals the two embraced "as one body," a metaphoric mothering in which Frankie, if only momentarily, accepts Berenice as mother, something Frankie has been reluctant to do throughout the novel.

At the conclusion of the novel, however, once she has been to the wedding and found that she will not be accepted as a member, Frankie lashes out at Berenice who sits next to her on the long bus ride back to her childhood world: "She was sitting next to Berenice, back with the colored people, and when she thought of it she used the word she had never used before, nigger--for now she hated everyone and wanted only to spite and shame" (135). In recognizing the limits of her own identity, Frankie recalls the stereotypes of her southern culture in order to break her association with

Berenice which she feels is ultimately responsible for her own failings.

If Frankie's rejection of Berenice here is purely symbolic, she finally achieves a break from Berenice of more substance as Frankie and her father prepare to move from their house, leaving Berenice behind. For her part, Berenice "had given quit notice and said that she might as well marry T.T." (149), and the Addams's decision to move to "the new suburb of town" marks the beginning of Frankie's final break with Berenice. The two are in the kitchen together for a final time--and "the first time in a long while"--when Frankie recognizes the transformation of their world and of their relationship:

It was not the same kitchen of the summer that now seemed so long ago. The pencil pictures had disappeared beneath a coat of calcimine, and new linoleum covered the splintery floor. Even the table had been moved, pushed back against the wall, since now there was nobody to take meals with Berenice. (149)

The alteration of the kitchen implies a rejection of the black world which Frankie associates with her childhood: John Henry's manic pencil drawings are painted over in a "coat of calcimine" just as Frankie vehemently cuts her own association with the black world that those drawings represented.

McCullers further emphasizes the division between Frankie and Berenice--and Frankie's symbolic rejection of Berenice--as Frankie makes sandwiches for Mary Littlejohn, a new friend who is coming to see her: "Frances glanced at

Berenice, who was sitting idle in a chair, wearing an old raveled sweater, her limp arms hanging at her sides" (150). Berenice has served her purpose for Frankie, who at the conclusion of the narrative has broken with the black world to which she clung throughout the novel. Berenice's arms hang limp at her sides, her authority in the kitchen having been usurped and thus her relationship with Frankie breached. As is apparent in Huck Finn, the relationship can only be maintained when forces outside of it exert little pressure upon the white character: Huck is able to maintain his ability to see Jim as an individual only until they leave the river and Huck becomes reunited with Tom Sawyer. Here, in like manner, Frankie abandons Berenice upon finding her own Tom Sawyer in Mary Littlejohn.

Berenice is unlike Twain's Jim in that McCullers does not instill in her the patience of Job. While Jim reacts with only mild displeasure as he watches Huck and Tom fritter away the possibility of an easy escape, Berenice reacts with the vitriol of a spurned lover when Frankie announces that she and Mary Littlejohn will "travel around the world together" after she moves:

"Mary Littlejohn," said Berenice, in a tinged voice. "Mary Littlejohn."

Berenice could not appreciate Michelangelo or poetry, let alone Mary Littlejohn. There had at first been words between them on the subject. Berenice had spoken of Mary as being lumpy and marshmallow-white and Frances had defended fiercely. . . .

"There's no use our discussing a certain party. You could not possibly understand her. It's just not in you." She had said that once before to Berenice,

and from the sudden faded stillness in her eye she knew that the words had hurt. (150-151)

Frankie for the first time in the novel prepares her own food, and not coincidentally the meal is for her and Mary Littlejohn (in whom Frankie has found the new name for hopping-john that she sought earlier), who has supplanted Berenice in Frankie's life.

Berenice's conspicuous dislike for Mary Littlejohn further underscores her remove from Frankie at the end of the novel. In particular, it is Mary Littlejohn's whiteness that offends: Frankie "had defended fiercely" against Berenice's assertion that Mary was "lumpy and marshmallow white." Frankie's assertion that Berenice "could not possibly understand" Mary Littlejohn ironically symbolizes Frankie's growth in the course of the novel, a growth finally possible only after she forsakes her relationship with Berenice.

The final lines of the novel reveal the extent to which Frankie's identity remains fragmented, yet she has redirected her search for wholeness to the white world exclusive of Berenice: "'I am simply mad about--' but the sentence was left unfinished for the hush was shattered when, with an instant shock of happiness, she heard the ringing of the bell" (153). Mary Littlejohn's arrival signals the conclusion of Frankie's relationship with Berenice: if Frankie's world remains fragmented, she no longer associates that fragmentation with Berenice. Rather,

at the conclusion of the novel she has rejected her union with Berenice in favor of a possible wholeness in her relationship with Mary Littlejohn.

iii

Like Member of the Wedding, Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird (1960) actively confronts the oppression of blacks in the modern South, and in doing so it employs many of the conventions of earlier novels like Huckleberry Finn and Intruder in the Dust. Atticus Finch's defense of Tom Robinson, a local black man wrongly accused of raping a white woman, directly parallels Atticus's children's growing understanding of their mysterious neighbor, Boo Radley. The didactic imperatives of the novel emerge from these parallel narrative structures: Lee ties Scout's curiosity over Arthur Radley (whom Scout calls "Boo") with Atticus's legal defense of Robinson. Scout's moral development in the course of the novel comes not directly from the black persons whom she encounters, as in Huckleberry Finn, but rather from her own virtuous father, whom Lee depicts as a modern and enlightened planter of much intelligence and compassion, a great white father of the old order, short the racism. Propping up Tom Robinson for Atticus to save, Lee portrays Robinson as the maligned victim, a hand-me-down from Robinson's namesake, Uncle Tom.

Scout's relationship with Boo Radley roughly parallels Huck's relationship with Jim in that, while Scout initially assumes Boo to be a lascivious demon haunting her neighborhood, by the end of the novel she has come to see him as an individual. Scout and her brother Jem and friend Dill torment Boo and his family in an effort to draw Boo out from his house. Just as the townspeople stereotype Tom Robinson due to their fear of blacks, Scout, Jem and Dill stereotype Boo Radley as a bogeyman extraordinaire, at one point daring one another to go as close as possible to Boo's house. The stereotypes which the town encourages convince the three children of the threat that Boo represents to them and to the town:

Inside the house lived a malevolent phantom. People said he existed, but Jem and I had never seen him. People said he went out at night when the moon was down, and peeped in windows. When people's azaleas froze in a cold snap, it was because he had breathed on them. Any stealthy crimes committed in Maycomb were his work. (13)

Such are the stereotypes which Scout works against through the course of the novel. Like Tom Robinson, Boo is suspected of aberrant sexual behavior when he "peeped in windows at night," and, like Tom, he is blamed for the bizarre crimes of whites in Maycomb. When the citizens of the town began to find their chickens and pets mutilated, they blamed Boo, and though the actual culprit was later found, "people still looked at the Radley Place at night, unwilling to discard their initial suspicions" (13). Such

suspicious mirror those the white community of Maycomb has of the black community. Lee portrays both Boo and Tom Robinson as brutes who hold no true threat over the whites of the town because of their acceptance of passive and docile roles. As Twain denies Jim the essential power to set himself free of the constraints of slave society, Lee creates parallel characters who are powerless and obliging. Having established such parallels between Boo and Tom, Lee demonstrates the ways in which Scout learns to overcome her stereotyped thinking of Boo at just the same time that Atticus demonstrates Tom's innocence to all of Maycomb.

To emphasize further the relationship between black identity and Scout's development, Lee develops a relationship between Scout and Calpurnia, the Finch's cook and maid, which closely parallels the relationship between Frankie and Berenice in Member of the Wedding. Both Scout and Jem look to Calpurnia as a maternal figure since their own mother has died, just as many of the white adolescents in the novels I have examined in previous chapters have looked to older blacks for parental guidance that they are not able to gain from their own white parents.

Lee portrays Calpurnia as a moral guide of sorts for Scout, but, like Jim in the opening pages of Huck Finn, Cal offers guidance very much in the context of the white social order within which she is employed. When, for instance, Scout is rude at the dinner table to Walter Cunningham, a

poor white boy whom she has invited to eat with the family, Calpurnia sets the girl right: "Yo' folks might be better'n the Cunninghams but it don't count for nothin' the way you're disgracin' 'em--if you can't act fit to eat at the table you can just set here and eat in the kitchen!" (29). Calpurnia's sense of moral right, like that of many of Jim's southern descendants, falls safely within the parameters of patriarchal white culture. In this she contrasts with McCullers's Berenice, who offers a matriarchal refuge as she provides Frankie Addams with not only a maternal figure but also an exotic model of feminine sexuality.

When Scout and Jem discuss the superstitions surrounding "hot steams," the warm spaces in the air which are reputed to be spirits who can't get to heaven, Scout remembers that Calpurnia dismissed the idea as "nigger-talk." Like McCullers, Lee looks to black identity as a catalyst for moral growth, but, unlike McCullers, Lee defines that identity within the narrow confines of white perception.

For a moment in the text, when Calpurnia takes Scout and Jem to her church because Atticus is out of town, Lee undercuts this apparent rejection of black identity. Because of the controversy surrounding Tom Robinson's arrest, some of the church members are reluctant to accept the white children:

"What you up to, Miss Cal?" said a voice behind us.

Calpurnia's hands went to our shoulders and we stopped and looked around: standing in the path behind us was a tall Negro woman. Her weight was on one leg; she rested her left elbow in the curve of her hip, pointing at us with upturned palm. She was bullet-headed with strange almond-shaped eyes, straight nose, and an Indian-bow mouth. She seemed seven feet high.

I felt Calpurnia's hand dig into my shoulder. "What you want, Lula?" she asked, in tones I had never heard her use. She spoke quietly, contemptuously.

"I wants to know why you bringin' white chillun to nigger church."

"They's my comp'ny," said Calpurnia. Again I thought her voice strange: she was talking like the rest of them.

"Yeah, an' reckon you's comp'ny at the Finch house durin' the week." (121)

Lula's challenge to the children and to Calpurnia represents the resentment of the black community of Maycomb toward the white community and perhaps as well to the condescension inherent in the role Atticus Finch has made for himself. Lula points to the inescapable fact which Calpurnia forgets: though Cal calls Scout and Jem "my children" (120), the division between them is large. Scout's surprise at Calpurnia's "strange" voice represents the extent to which she is removed from this black world and the barriers which she has established against it. Even when other church members openly accept them, Scout and Jem are held at a distance, placed in the front pew and specially welcomed by the pastor.

Lee demonstrates the ways in which the children come to see the members of the black community as individuals when Scout and Jem express their utter amazement at the fact that the town garbage collector, Zeebo, leads the congregation in

a hymn. The two come to see him as an individual capable of complexity beyond the stereotyped view they had earlier taken of him. As they leave the church, Scout yearns to "stay and explore," her curiosity having been piqued by this encounter with the black world, but Calpurnia brings her away. Nevertheless, Scout remains entranced: "'Cal,' I asked, 'why do you talk nigger-talk to the--to your folks when you know it's not right?'" (128). Scout's curiosity and surprise at Calpurnia's "modest double life" (128) leads her to desire a bond with Calpurnia outside the white world in which they have functioned previously, much like the bond which she will ultimately form with Boo Radley.

The explanation which Atticus offers Scout for his decision to represent Tom Robinson reveals his role as a white patriarch in Maycomb: "Do you defend niggers, Atticus?" Scout asks her father. "Of course I do," he replies, "Don't say nigger, Scout. That's common" (79). Atticus' initial acceptance of the term "nigger" points to the position he takes in regard to Tom, and his insistence that Scout not use the term because it's "common," points to the traditional southern fictional representations of social relationships between black and white. Scout is not to use the word not because it is inherently degrading to blacks but rather because it reflects poorly upon the Finch family, which Atticus holds up as a final bastion of southern pride.

Like McCullers, Lee relies heavily upon numerous conventions of southern literature which characterize the white South's confrontation with black identity. Repeatedly in these southern novels we see scenes in which a white character rescues an unjustly accused black man from certain death at the hands of an angry mob. Elizabeth Spencer employs irony in just such a scene in The Voice at the Back Door to reveal the complexity of her white and black characters--to show, that is, that they resist stereotyping. Lee, on the other hand, delivers the scene straight to the reader, inflating the traditional stereotypes with pathos. After Atticus has taken a defensive position in front of the Maycomb jail in which Tom Robinson is being held, an angry mob confronts him, intending to take Tom and lynch him. When the mob asks him if Tom is in the jail, Atticus coolly responds that he is "and he's asleep. Don't wake him up" (153). Not to be put off by his paternal warning, the mob is ultimately thwarted when Scout, Jem and Dill appear. When Scout recognizes one of the men as the father of her schoolmate, she quietly asks after his son, leading him to call the lynching off. The sentiment of the scene undermines its earnestness.

After the mob has left and Atticus is leaving with Jem and Scout, Tom calls to them on the street:

"Mr. Finch?"

A soft husky voice came from the darkness above:
"They gone?"

Atticus stepped back and looked up. "They've gone," he said. "Get some sleep, Tom. They won't bother you anymore." (157)

As Tom's savior, Atticus' primary concern is that Tom Robinson get a proper amount of sleep on this night when he is closest to death. When Jem worries that the mob might easily have killed his father, Atticus responds in the fashion of Colonel Sherburn, Mark Twain's white father: "Every mob in every little southern town is always made up of people, you know--doesn't say much for them, does it?" Atticus maintains his willingness to sacrifice himself for Tom Robinson here and yet he has clearly established a distance between himself and Tom which he makes no effort to bridge. "Get some sleep, Tom," he says, a superior and distant parent to his child. And the emotional distance that Atticus establishes through his condescension is precisely the same as that which Scout will establish between herself and Boo Radley at the end of the novel. Having taken her lesson from her father, Scout will speak to Boo, twenty years her senior, as though he is a child.

When Tom Robinson's case goes to court, Jem and Scout secretly watch the proceedings from among the blacks sitting in the courtroom balcony. As Atticus questions Tom in court, Scout evaluates Tom from her perch in the balcony: "He seemed to be a respectable Negro, and a respectable Negro would never go up into somebody's yard of his own

volition" (195) as Mayella Ewell has accused him of doing. Scout likewise can nearly find Tom sexually attractive: "Tom was a black-velvet Negro, not shiny, but soft black velvet. . . . If he had been whole, he would have been a fine specimen of a man." (195) Lee intends the passage to convey Scout's ability to see the human values which Tom possesses, but the language she employs here denies Tom his humanity. Scout judges Tom not as a man but as a "specimen," restricting him from humanity in general into the Huck Finn laboratory in which Scout is learning. Lee employs Tom Robinson not as a man on equal footing with other men but as a laboratory animal of sorts, and a lame one at that, given his disabled arm.

Like Stowe's Tom, Robinson receives harsh treatment at the hands of the whites he serves so well, yet he reacts with no vehemence or revenge. Instead he is utterly passive in the face of grave injustice, as we see in his courtroom description of his fateful meeting with Mayella Ewell:

The witness swallowed hard. "She reached up an' kissed me 'side of th' face. She says she never kissed a grown man and she might as well kiss a nigger. She says what her Papa do to her don't count. She says, 'Kiss me back, nigger.' I say Miss Mayella lemme outa here an' tried to run but she got her back to the door an' I'da had to push her, I didn't want to harm her, Mr. Finch, an' I say lemme pass, but just when I say it Mr. Ewell yonder hollered through the window."

"What did he say?"

Tom Robinson swallowed again, and his eyes widened. "Somethin' not fittin' to say--not fittin' for these folks and chillun to hear--"

"What did he say, Tom? You *must* tell the jury what he said."

Tom Robinson shut his eyes tight. "He says you goddamn whore, I'll kill ya."

"Then what happened?"

"Mr. Finch, I was runnin' so fast I didn't know what happened." (197)

Upon hearing Tom's speech, Scout happily concludes that "in their own way, Tom Robinson's manners were as good as Atticus's" (197), a sensible conclusion, for Tom Robinson is Atticus Finch's black ideal. Lame, docile, victimized, he represents the black man that white liberals in the South prop up time and again in arguing for better treatment of blacks: he is in fact no man at all but a thin figure of one. "Were you scared?" Atticus Finch asks Robinson after the trial. "Mr. Finch, if you was a nigger like me, you'd be scared, too" (198). It seems Tom has fantasies of his own about white identity.

In his summation, Atticus Finch debunks southern stereotypes of blacks in arguing that the state's testimony against Tom Robinson has been designed to play upon the white jury's stereotypes of black behavior, "in the cynical confidence" that the jury would assume that "all Negroes lie, that all Negroes are basically immoral beings, that all Negro men are not to be trusted around our women" (207). Such manipulation on the part of the state, Atticus argues, is associated "with minds of their caliber," reminding again that a major argument throughout the novel is that the likes of Tom Ewell are to blame for the South's racism. Atticus

reminds the jury that this stereotype of blacks is unfounded,

a lie as black as Tom Robinson's skin, a lie I do not have to point out to you. You know the truth, and the truth is this: some Negroes lie, some Negroes are immoral, some Negro men are not to be trusted around women--black or white. But that is a truth that applies to the human race and to no particular race of men. There is not a person in this courtroom who has never told a lie, who has never done an immoral thing...." (207)

Atticus's summation reveals him to be something of the consummate white patriarch, attempting, like the southern authors of the novels I examine here, to develop and complexify the white community's view of blacks by portraying blacks as individuals outside of stereotype. Even in his noble speech, however, we see the seeds of stereotype returned: Atticus asserts that the lie is "as black as Tom Robinson's skin," ironically linking Tom with the very stereotype from which he is ostensibly attempting to free him. Likewise, though surely Atticus speaks for Lee here (much as Gavin Stevens speaks for Faulkner in Intruder in the Dust), the fact remains that Lee chooses Tom Robinson, an affable victim of stereotyping, to represent the predicaments of blacks in this novel. Like Twain eighty years earlier, Lee consciously chooses a black character who does not threaten, allowing one stereotype to replace another.

For all of Atticus's pleading, the jury finds Tom guilty of rape. That the black community nevertheless comes

to revere Atticus for his efforts to help Tom suggests the valuation of white identity over black throughout the novel. As Scout sits quietly in the balcony in the moments after the verdict is announced, she is surprised when the black men and women around her stand to honor her father as he leaves the courtroom:

Someone was punching me, but I was reluctant to take my eyes from the people below us, and from the image of Atticus' lonely walk down the aisle.

"Miss Jean Louise?"

I looked around. They were standing. All around us and in the balcony on the opposite wall, the Negroes were getting to their feet. Reverend Syke's voice was as distant as Judge Taylor's:

"Miss Jean Louise, stand up. Your father's passin'." (214)

If Lee denies that all blacks are docile and respectful through Atticus Finch's grand speech to the jury, the black characters she portrays share those characteristics with Tom Robinson. Nowhere here does a black character break out of the stereotype which Atticus debunks so eloquently. The courtroom scene is a white fantasy of black behavior, in which the black community pays homage to the failed but noble efforts of a liberal white southerner, much as generations of readers of Huckleberry Finn have paid homage to Huck in celebrating his decision to go to hell and overlooking his failure to get there.

When, at the end of the novel, Scout's school teacher creates a pageant for the schoolchildren, she chooses Scout to portray an exceedingly appropriate Maycomb County

agricultural product: a ham. Like Scout, Lee is a bit of a ham, too, particularly in this final section in which she completes the link between Boo Radley's plight and Tom Robinson's. Bob Ewell, who by this point in the novel has not only become diabolical and thoroughly stereotyped but has also taken all of the burden of black oppression squarely upon his decidedly working-class shoulders, attacks Jem and Scout on their way home from the pageant, with Scout still in her ham costume. Happily, Boo Radley comes upon the scene and kills Ewell. When Scout later realizes that it is Boo Radley who has saved her, she describes him as he appears to her, for the first time outside of the stereotype she has heaped upon him earlier in the novel:

He was still leaning against the wall. He had been leaning against the wall when I came into the room, his arms folded across his chest. As I pointed, he brought his arms down and pressed the palms of his hands against the wall. They were white hands, sickly white hands that had never seen the sun, so white they stood out garishly against the dull cream wall in the dim light of Jem's room.

I looked from his hands to his sand-stained khaki pants; my eyes traveled up his thin frame to his torn denim shirt. His face was as white as his hands, but for a shadow on his jutting chin. His cheeks were thin to hollowness; his mouth was wide; there were shallow, almost delicate indentations at his temples, and his grey eyes were so colorless I thought he was blind. His hair was dead and thin, almost feathery on the top of his head.

When I pointed to him his palms slipped slightly, leaving greasy sweat streaks on the wall, and he hooked his thumbs in his belt. A strange small spasm shook him, as if he heard fingernails scrape slate, but as I gazed at him in wonder the tension slowly drained from his face. His lips parted into a timid smile, and our neighbor's image blurred with my sudden tears.

"Hey, Boo," I said. (273)

Like Tom Robinson, Boo Radley is an outcast impaired: his "sickly white hands" and the "delicate indentations at his temples" distinguish him from the Finches, and these characteristics also lead Scout to take a benevolent and finally patriarchal attitude toward him. Scout's distaste for Boo's whiteness ("sickly white hands" that "stood out garishly against the dull cream wall") may reflect on her discomfort with her own white identity, given what she has witnessed in the course of the novel, but the condescension inherent in the patriarchal stance she assumes at the end of the novel belies any such discomfort. The control Scout assumes over Boo Radley parallels that which Atticus takes over Tom Robinson in court, and if both Atticus and Scout are protective of their charges, they also limit them with their condescension.

iv

Carson McCullers and Harper Lee employ the parameters of the relationship between black and white in developing their white protagonists through relationships with black men and women. While McCullers succeeds in portraying Berenice at points as an autonomous figure--and a complex one--Lee portrays Calpurnia as a much less independent figure. Calpurnia, like Tom Robinson, reasserts her charge's white identity whereas Berenice, while finally

unsuccessful, encourages Frankie to reassess her identity by staying within the black world she associates with Berenice. In the following chapter, I consider two contemporary writers working very much in the tradition of McCullers and Lee as they characterize the development of teenaged girls: Sara Flanigan and Kaye Gibbons.

CHAPTER 4
HUCK IN THE RECENT SOUTH

1

Contemporary white writers in the South focus upon race and racial stereotypes as much as any group of southern writers since the 1865. We see elements of the pattern I'm discussing in novels as diverse as Harry Crews's All We Need of Hell, Clyde Edgerton's Raney, and Shirley Ann Grau's The Keepers of the House. These and numerous other southern novels of the past two decades focus specifically on a white protagonist's ability to see a black character as an individual and that protagonist's subsequent moral growth. In the years since the civil rights movement began, the pattern has become so commonplace as to be reduced to cliché through overuse, in particular as seen on television and film. We see it on stage as well: Alfred Uhry's Driving Miss Daisy directly parallels Twain's portrayal, both in its initial portrayal of a union of black and white and in a subsequent return of the black character to stereotype. In this chapter, I look at two contemporary novels--Sudie by Sara Flanigan and Ellen Foster by Kaye Gibbons--which in

large part mirror the pattern even as they attempt to avert the return to stereotype that we've seen in other novels.

ii

Sara Flanigan's Sudie (1981) portrays the fascination of two young girls with a black man, Simpson, who lives secretly just outside the all-white southern town of Linlow, Georgia. The novel's narrator, Mary Agnes, refuses through much of the novel to see Simpson in other than stereotypical terms, while Sudie, Mary Agnes's best friend, accepts Simpson from the beginning despite her initial fears of him. Structurally, the novel resembles Huck Finn as told by Tom Sawyer, since we are often one remove from the relationship between Sudie and Simpson. Yet Flanigan employs the Huck Finn narrative by developing much of the novel from Sudie's perspective, vaguely filtered through Mary Agnes. As in To Kill a Mockingbird, the sins of the white community are represented by a white rapist who contrasts with the pure if impotent Simpson; like Tom Robinson, Simpson develops into a charitable and passive noble savage.

In the course of the novel, Mary Agnes acquires her appreciation for Simpson out of a background of extreme prejudice against blacks. Her father and grandfather have helped to keep blacks out of Linlow ("Daddy says he wouldn't

raise no younguns in a town full of niggers" [6]), to the extent that most of the children living there have never seen a black person: Daddy "said if they was any niggers lived in this town he wouldn't even let us out of the house. . . . he and Granddaddy put them signs up on the highway that says, NIGGER DON'T LET THE SUN SHINE ON YOU IN LINLOW...." (7). Thus when Mary Agnes learns that Sudie has a black friend, she exclaims: "But, Sudie! Niggers is boogers! They kill folks!" (47).

Having already overcome her initial trepidation of Simpson, Sudie replies that Simpson doesn't kill folks: like Huck Finn, Sudie sees her black mentor as an individual. Mary Agnes' further questions reveal the cruel stereotypes that she has learned from her family and from the citizens of Linlow: "Does he have a name?" and "Does he act like a real man?" (48). The novel traces Mary Agnes' development away from such stereotypes and her eventual recognition of the hypocrisy of the white world in which she has been raised. By the conclusion, she will recognize that nearly everyone in Linlow lies and that she can trust only a very few people that she knows; Mary will come to reject her white world as a result of her indirect relationship with Simpson.

As the narrative looks back to the time when Sudie and Simpson first met, we see that Sudie herself reacts much as we have seen Mary Agnes react at the idea of confronting a

black man. Sudie first sees Simpson standing on the railroad tracks leading out of town, holding a bleeding rabbit, and she responds with inert terror: "She said she jest couldn't get her legs to move or her arms or nothing." As Sudie stands watching Simpson "all she could think about was them stories we'd heard all our life about niggers being boogers that would git us and eat us alive. She said it was jest spookie" (64). Simpson voluntarily assumes a passive position relative to Sudie upon their first meeting, and he will maintain such a posture throughout the novel: "Don't be scared, miss. . . . All I'm gonna do is take this little rabbit and doctor him. Somebody's dogs was about to make a meal out of him" (64). If it's a wonder that a man living in a broken-down shack beside the railroad tracks would heal a rabbit rather than stew it, it's less of a surprise that Sudie would accept Simpson on the terms he establishes here. The nurturing disposition he exhibits toward Sudie (and, of course, toward the rabbit) in telling her not to be scared allows Sudie to accept him, but if she overcomes one stereotype of blacks, she accepts another in the process. Simpson, no longer the cruel and inhuman "booger man," is instead a compassionate and docile black angel whose good deeds are surpassed only by his patience and sagacity. In the southern race narratives we've examined above, the black character figures as hero simply for tolerating the afflictions heaped upon him by whites (Faulkner frequently

spoke and wrote of the nobility of American blacks' capacity to "endure"), often by playing the part of the "good nigger," and in my next chapter, I will show how black southerners challenge this myth. Here, we see the ways in which Flanigan, like Faulkner, persistently trades one stereotype for another.

When she realizes that she has been duped into believing that blacks are cruel by her white elders, Sudie tears down the signs Mary Agnes' father and grandfather had placed at the outskirts of the town to warn blacks away from Linlow. She alters one sign to read, "NIGGER, PLEASE LET THE SUN SHINE ON YOU IN LINLOW," and when she brings the revised sign to Simpson, their pleasure over her prank leads to an exchange in which they willfully attempt to undermine traditional southern gentility:

He put her down and she said, "Mr. Nigger, sir?"
 And he said, "Yes, Miss White Lady?"
 She pulled the sides of her dress out and curtsied.
 Then she said, "You're most welcome to let the sun set
 on you in Linlow, Georgia, of the United States."
 (81)

The passage suggests the extent to which Flanigan cannot finally escape the stereotypes of the old South, even as she attempts to subvert them. In addressing Simpson, Sudie retains the epithet "nigger," and Simpson's minstrel-like reply parallels the position in which we will find him throughout the novel: like Jim and Uncle Tom before him, Simpson, a fantasy of white author and white audience, worships the white child with whom he is linked.

Immediately after Simpson and Sudie share a tranquil afternoon together, Sudie returns to Linlow and is accosted by Bob Rice, a white teacher who molests the school girls of Linlow and pays them nickels to keep quiet. Since she began her relationship with Simpson, Sudie has told Rice that she won't have anything to do with him but Rice will not now allow her to leave:

Then 'fore she knowed it, he has pushed her down till she was on her knees, and he put his Thing right up against her face. She was crying harder than ever and it seemed like now he really liked her crying. He started giggling and saying lots of dirty words and cuss words. Then he really got crazy. (99-100)

Like Twain's Pap and Bob Ewell (Mockingbird), Bob Rice is a diabolic figure, Claggart with a drawl. Flanigan juxtaposes the rape scene with a meditative, placid scene in which Simpson attempts to save Sudie's sick rabbit, and her aim is abundantly clear, if none-too-subtle. Like Mark Twain and Harper Lee, she demonstrates the affirmative aspects of the black world in the novel while exposing the white world as a southern Sodom, but the manipulation in the melodrama here is confirmed by the stereotypes which she must employ to establish it.

As Sudie's relationship with Simpson develops, she gains a fuller sense of him as a human being. As in Huck Finn, the black character's individual identity emerges slowly from the morass of stereotypes that dominate the white community's thinking about blacks. When Sudie asks Simpson about his wife, who has died, she sees him for the first

time as a man capable of emotion. Simpson tells Sudie that his wife had tried to help him attain his high school diploma by bringing books home for him to study: "but she died 'fore he got it. When he told Sudie that, he broke down and cried like a baby, and Sudie cried too this time, and she patted his shoulder and his arm and his hand (144-145). The scene recalls Huck's experience with Jim on the river, in which Jim says how much he misses his family and narrates the story of his unwitting cruelty to his daughter. Huck undergoes an epiphany in the scene as he begins to see that Jim too experiences human emotion, and thus Huck begins to remove Jim from stereotype. In like manner, Sudie's friend Mary Agnes, in narrating this moment, begins to see Simpson in the human terms which Sudie has earlier accepted.

To further understand Simpson's experience as a black man in the deep South, Sudie sets out with him to a town near Linlow one afternoon. Doing her best John Howard Griffin impression, Sudie goes disguised as a black girl. She soon discovers the realities of segregation when Simpson tells her that they cannot go into a drug store to cool off:

"Well, why can't we then?"

"Chile, white folks don't let niggers set down in public places where they set down."

Sudie thought she hadn't heard him right.

"What?"

"We can't set where white folks set."

"Well, I ain't never heard of anything as silly! Where they let niggers set?"

"Not hardly nowhere." (166)

If wildly improbable--that a white child in Georgia in the 1940s would be wholly unaware of segregation seems a bit far-fetched-- the scene does enable Sudie to learn firsthand Simpson's moral imperative that Sudie shouldn't "make fun of no one that's different" (118). When Sudie demands to be served ice cream at the lunch counter, however, her "passing" ends in failure, as the proprietor agrees to serve her only when he sees that she is white. Try though she might, like Huck Finn, she fails to escape her white identity.

Simpson, unfazed by the racism that he and Sudie have witnessed in the town but moved by Sudie's reaction to it, immediately apologizes to Sudie for what she has witnessed. Sudie's growing awareness of the oppression of blacks in the South, however, leads her to reject Simpson's attempt to make amends for the white community:

"Quit saying you're sorry Simpson! Quit saying it, you hear!"

"Alright, Miss Sudie."

"And jest call me Sudie! Jest Sudie! Not Miss Sudie. I can't stand you to call me that. Not no more."

Simpson didn't answer. He jest held her hand.

"And I'm gonna call you Mr. Simpson! You hear! Why can't I call you Mr Simpson? I call everbody else Mister. Why not you?"

Simpson pulled her down on the bench. "Look here, chile," he said. "What I call you and what you call me is just fine with me, just fine. Do you understand that?"

"No, I sure don't!"

"Well, you will," he said and patted her arm. "One of these days you will. You'll understand it all when you get grown." (168)

Simpson ironically becomes an apologist for the racism of the southern society even as he inspires Sudie to reject the hypocrisy that leads to such racism. Flanigan willfully places Simpson further into a accomodating position here as he accepts the offenses of white society and even attempts to persuade Sudie to accept them.

Toward the end of the novel, a white citizen of Linlow, Lillian Graham, becomes lost and in the resultant search for her, Simpson's house is found among the thick kudzu vines in the forest outside of town. The discovery leads the white citizens of the town to assume that the unknown black man must have killed Graham, and they set out on a manhunt for Simpson. Sudie falls into a state of shock when she realizes that her friend has left town in order to escape. For her part, Mary Agnes receives harsh punishment when her parents soon realize that she has known about Simpson all along:

I could of throwed up, that's all, and when Daddy went out on the back porch and got that hick'ry switch I thought to myself, What kind of big joke is this? What am I gittin' whipped for? Am I just plain losing my own mind? I'd told them that Miss Marge was nice, that seemed like she was a real nice woman. I told them that Yeah, I had knowed about that nigger and that I had worried myself half to death about Sudie being friends with a nigger, but I sure never worried 'cause I thought he'd hurt her or nothing. She said he was nice. She said he was sweet to her. I hadn't never worried none about that part. And 'sides that, Mama said herself it was alright to be nice to a nigger if he knowed his place....

Well you'd of thought I was a-talking to myself to hear myself talk. They didn't listen to one single word I said, and while Daddy was switching my legs so hard I thought I'd die, and I was screaming and

jumping 'round to try to miss the switch, I thought to myself, You are liars. That's all y'all are. Liars! Jest like Sudie said. This whole day and this whole crazy thing is one fat bald-faced lie! The worst lie I ever heard of in my life--and I've heard some lies, that's for sure. (242-243)

Mary Agnes renounces her white society here and aligns her cause with Sudie and with Simpson; her renunciation leads to an acceptance of black identity like that in many of the novels I've considered in previous chapters. As we've seen, however, Mary Agnes demonstrates her allegiance to a black character significantly removed from humanity.

Immediately following this renunciation, Mary Agnes experiences an epiphany in her own development in which she vows her further allegiance to Sudie and to the racial awareness which her friend stands for. "I was gonna be Sudie's friend," she decides, no matter what her parents might do. She accepts the risk which accompanies such a decision because she sees that her parents' position is unjust: "They was wrong on this thing. Horrible wrong, and I couldn't do one thing about that. Not one thing" (243). Mary Agnes' rejection of her parents' views of blacks and of Sudie closely parallels Huck's decision to "go to hell" in setting out to free Jim. Like Huck, she rejects the predominant morality of her society in making her decision to befriend Sudie, and she does so at considerable risk.

And like Huck, who must at the end of his novel "light out ahead of the rest," Mary Agnes comes to an awareness of the need to maintain an attitude which questions the

dictates of her white society: "I learned lots of things from her that set me to wondering about people, white folks and niggers both" (273). And such knowledge will apparently maintain her distance from her white society: "I reckon that from now on I'm gonna have to keep on thinking on it myself 'cause I sure don't like what I seen happen in this town about Simpson" (274). Mary Agnes's declaration recalls Huck's decision that Jim is "white inside" in that she clings to the negative even as she accepts Simpson's basic humanity: "I don't like it one bit," she continues, "even if he is a nigger" (275). Both Twain and Flanigan portray their protagonists clinging to the very stereotypes that they are ostensibly attempting to overcome, and while their irony demonstrates their own understanding of the condescension inherent in their protagonists' declarations, both authors ultimately employ a similar condescension through their portrayal of black characters wholly lacking in complexity.

At the conclusion of Flanigan's novel, we see Simpson's moral effect on the town of Linlow in its entirety. Sudie's parents allow her to wear the yellow dress that Simpson left for her as a token of his love. Likewise, Preacher Miller, who had so often supported segregation in his sermons, no longer preaches "as scarey as he use to." Mary Agnes even sees some development in her own parents: "Mama and Daddy snorted and humph'ed for a while and I reckon Daddy would

die 'fore he'd say he was wrong about niggers, but at least him and Mama said, Well, okay, I could be Sudie's friend" (279). Thus Simpson retires from his philanthropic endeavors, having set right the evils of Linlow and changed nearly everyone for the better. In the process he has recovered from his own melancholia and, apparently, little more than his love for Sudie will now light his life: he quietly leaves Linlow and in so doing he returns Sudie and Mary Agnes to their white world. But as we see in the final pages of the novel, even the reserved Mary Agnes now actively fights the injustice she has seen in the town when she tears down the last of her elders' bitter signs warning blacks away from Linlow.

If this moral restructuring appears proper to Sudie and Mary Agnes, however, Huck Finn might describe it as so much "soul- butter and hogwash" (213). In his worship of the childhood world of his white friend, we see in Simpson not only Twain's Jim but also Stowe's Uncle Tom: the type has long been a white fantasy, as much for Stowe before the war as for contemporary liberal writers in the South. Free of slavery and/or racial prejudice, the docile black character restricts himself to the simple world of white children and represents no threat to the dominant culture: he moves to the woods where he's out of the way, busy protecting the lame rabbits of the world and offering companionship and love to forlorn white children. Such a vision parallels

Twain's portrayal of Jim as docile and nurturing: having escaped slavery, both characters remain essentially enslaved in the white imagination. In this they are like Sudie and Mary Agnes, who themselves do not escape the literary stereotypes which Twain established.

iii

Like Huck Finn, Ellen, the protagonist of Kaye Gibbons' first novel, Ellen Foster (1987), wavers between her own flawed white community and that of her black friend Starletta in trying to gain a clear sense of her own identity. She initially views Starletta and her family with disdain, but her experiences with them cause her to identify with her own emergent sense of their black identity as she rejects her own family. By the end of the novel, however, Ellen finds a white foster home, and she reassumes a patrician air toward Starletta even as she declares her great debt to her.

At the outset of the novel, Ellen's mother dies and Ellen finds herself living alone with her abusive, drunken father, a character remarkably similar to 'Pap' Finn. Like Pap, Ellen's father assumes complete control over his child and he becomes the most apparent symbol of the child's rejection of white society. In a scene closely resembling Pap's drunken rage in Huckleberry Finn, Ellen's father threatens

her with rape and compels her to escape the house. When her father brings a group of black men home to drink with him, Ellen overhears one of the men suggesting that Ellen "is just about ripe [because] you gots to git em when they is still soff when you mashum." Ellen crawls into her closet in terror: "What else do you do when your house is run over by colored men drinking whiskey and singing and your daddy is worse than all put together?" (37). Gibbons ties Ellen's white world to a black world straight out of the old southern stereotype: her father terrifies her all the more because she associates blackness and black identity with evil. The desperation she feels in the face of the white world in which she is left is directly tied to her fear of a black world which she does not know. In the course of the novel she will overcome such stereotypes of the black community and see in it a means of escape from her own white world.

When the group of men leave her house, Ellen's father stumbles drunkenly to her room, apparently intent upon following the suggestions of his friends. In Ellen's narration of the attack, we see the extent to which she must claim her identity as it contrasts with that of her white parents:

You pray to God they forget about you and the sweet young things that are soff when you mashum and how good one feels when she is pressed up by you. You get out before one can wake up from being passed out on your floor. You get out before they start to dream about the honey pie and the sugar plums. Step over

the sleeping arms and legs of dark men in shadows on your floor. You want to see a light so bad that it comes to guide you through the room and out the door where a man stops you and the light explodes into a sound that is your daddy's voice.

Get away from me he does not listen to me but touches his hands harder on me. That is not me. Oh no that was her name. Do not oh you do not say her name to me. That was her name. You know that now stop no not my name.

I am Ellen.

I am Ellen.

He pulls the evil back into his self and Lord I run. Run down the road to Starletta. Now to the smoke coming out of the chimney against the night sky I run.

Down the path in darkness I gather my head and all that is spinning out from me and wonder oh you just have to wonder what the world has come to. (37-38)

As her father mistakes her for her mother, Ellen, like Huck, must declare her identity outright. And her declaration of self here calls to mind Huck's plea when Pap mistakes him for the Angel of Death: "I begged, and told him I was only Huck, but he laughed such a screechy laugh, and roared and cussed and kept on chasing me up" (36). Both scenes symbolize the psychological rape of the protagonists at the hands of their fathers. And just as Ellen escapes from her father shortly after this scene, Huck makes his escape from Pap shortly after this experience; both protagonists escape into the waiting arms of nurturing black characters who display more concern for the white protagonists' well being than for their own.

In leaving her father's home, Ellen seeks an amiable family for herself, but she discovers that her relatives look upon her as a burden. She finds more compassion in Starletta's home (which "always smells like fried meat but

if you visit there a while you adjust" [29]), but she cautiously refuses their kindness because of her own prejudice. Where Huck Finn begins to see Jim's humanity through Jim's open display of affection for his family ("I do believe he cared just as much for his people as white folks does for their'n. It don't seem natural, but I reckon it's so" [125]), Ellen sees Starletta's family interacting in a way much more gentle than she has seen in her own house. She arrives with much ado from Starletta's father:

Come on in the house is what her daddy says to me and takes my package. They pay grown men to do that in more stylish places. Her mama is at the stove boiling and frying and telling the daddy not to let all the heat out through the door.

He sneaks up behind her and pinches her on the tail. I saw that.

They would not carry on like that if they were at the store or working in the field. They walk up the road and pick cotton and do not speak like they know they go together. People say they do not try to be white.

As fond as I am of all three of them I do not think I could drink after them. I try to see what Starletta leaves on the lip of a bottle but I have never seen anything with the naked eye. If something is that small it is bound to get into your system and do some damage. (30)

Despite Ellen's surprise at the affection she witnesses in the house, the likes of which she has never seen, she cannot overcome the stereotypes of blacks that she has learned from her parents. The language with which Ellen describes Starletta's family exposes the fleeting nature of her own identity. Her abbreviated, disjointed sentences--"They walk up the road and pick cotton and do not speak like they know they go together"--reflect her alienation from Starletta's

family though at the same time she appears ill at ease with the southern dialect she takes from her parents. Like Huck Finn in his relationship with Jim, Ellen will disregard evidence of Starletta's humanity and her family for much of the narrative, preferring instead to trust the stereotypes she has grown up with rather than her own experience.

Ellen emphasizes the difference that she feels between herself and Starletta's family in her withdrawal from them at the beginning of the novel. When Starletta invites Ellen to play with her new Christmas toys, Ellen refuses: "You got to wash before I will play with you is what I told her" (31). Ellen still assumes a natural difference between the two and takes a privileged position in Starletta's home, despite her own destitution: "Her baby dolls smell like her in a day or two and if she gets any crayons she breaks them just to hear them snap. I will not color with a broke crayon" (31). In the course of the novel, however, Ellen will come to realize the folly of such condescension and will likewise accept Starletta's family as her own.

Ellen removes Starletta and her family from her stereotyped perception of blacks when they are persistently kind in the face of the abusive behavior she receives from her father and her other relatives. Even though she refuses to sit down at dinner with them, they include her as a member of their family. Her efforts to stereotype Starletta and her family continue to be undermined by the human warmth

which they exhibit toward her. When Starletta's mother offers Ellen a biscuit, Ellen thinks to herself that "no matter how good it looks to you it is still a colored biscuit." But she is immediately forced to question such assumptions when Starletta's parents unexpectedly give her a present for Christmas: "Oh my God it is a sweater. I like it so much. I do not tell a story when I say it does not look colored at all" (32). Ellen begins to adapt to Starletta's family as though they are her own, even if she clings to her former stereotypes of blacks in the process.

Yet Ellen soon leaves Starletta to stay with her grandmother (she calls her "my mama's mama"), who forces Ellen to work in the cotton fields for her keep. Such a role leads Ellen to a new awareness of black identity which will soon bring her closer to her friend Starletta. Working in the fields, she recognizes that she has taken a position in this southern society traditionally reserved for blacks:

I thought while I chopped from one field to the next how I could pass for colored now. Somebody riding by here in a car could not see my face and know I was white. But that is OK now I thought to myself of how it did not make much of a difference anymore.

If I just looked at my own arms and legs up to where my shorts and shirt started I said I could pass for colored now. I was tan from the sun but so dark I was just this side of colored. Under it all I was pinky white.

At the end of each day the colored workers went to their shack and I walked to my mama's mama's. On work days she left a plate of something for me on the stove. That might not sound social to you but it was perfect for me. (66)

Ellen sees her lack of a white identity as "passing," the term black Americans have traditionally used to describe those of mixed race who attempt to "pass" as white. Here, Ellen twice uses the term to describe her own denial of her white identity, and, as we shall see, that denial results in her ultimately clinging to this black society for her own moral identity. While black identity and the poverty which she associates with it are initially reprehensible to Ellen, in the course of the novel, she comes to a sense of a black ideal which grows out of her experience in the cotton field. Blacks early in the novel provide her sole refuge from the torments of her white relatives, and, like Flanigan's Sudie, she comes to fully value this refuge only after "passing" through her own white society as though she were black.

Having established this black ideal, Ellen is no longer much concerned with her lack of a white identity: "Somebody riding by here in a car could not see my face and know I was white," she says, yet she concludes that "it did not make much of a difference anymore" (66). Her self-evaluation, however, results in her conclusion that she finally cannot escape her whiteness ("just this side of colored," "I was all pinky white") though her final rejection of the white society of her grandmother suggests the extent to which she will cling to the black community for her own sense of identity. Ellen rejects her grandmother as a symbol of white society much like her father. Both are spiteful

characters, and Ellen looks to the black laborers with whom she works to replace them. She idealizes the sort of community which she sees in these laborers:

After supper each night it was not raining I walked up the colored path and spied on Mavis and her family.

It looked like slavery times with them all hanging out on the porch picking at each other. They fought strong as they played and laughed.

I looked regularly but they never saw me or at least they did not mention to me stay away from their house. I wondered right much about them and the way they got along.

My mama's mama didn't pay them doodly-squat. I saw the amount she had written on the envelope she handed Mavis every Friday.

She did not pay me a cent except room and board. I kept figuring up how much I was worth by the hour.

But Mavis and her family showed up in the field every day when I was thinking of how I would save up my money and leave if I was as old as them. I guess it never dawned on them just to pack up and leave.

While I was eavesdropping at the colored house I started a list of all that a family should have. Of course there is the mama and the daddy but if one has to be missing then it is OK if the one left can count for two. But not just anybody can count for more than his or her self.

While I watched Mavis and her family I thought I would bust open if I did not get one of them for my own self soon. Back then I had not figured out how to go about getting one but I had a feeling it could be got.

I only wanted one white and with a little more money. At least we can have running water is what I thought. (66-67)

Gibbons' portrayal makes "the colored path" into a yellow brick road to moral sensibility: merely observing Mavis's family, Ellen comes to a new understanding of herself. But even as she claims kinship with the black family, she distances herself from them through condescension. Characterizing the family as noble savages, Ellen remarks that "they fought strong and played and laughed." She

fantasizes that such bliss is a return to "slavery times," and the analogy is of course not far off the mark: even as Ellen claims to be indignant at their plight ("My mama's mama didn't pay them doodly-squat."), she views them as lacking in motivation and incentive. Ellen cannot allow the family out of stereotype even as she offers them up as her ideal. If Ellen's stereotyping here turns the traditional southern stereotype on its head, it is no less oppressive than traditional stereotyping in adapting merely another formula: here, blacks are good, simple, wholesome and most whites are evil to the core. Like Sara Flanigan, Gibbons exchanges stereotypes as she attempts to escape them.

Just as Huck Finn comes to view his cause and Jim's as one, Ellen here ties her dilemma to that of Mavis' family. When she notes how little they are paid, her thoughts immediately turn to her own low wages: "She did not pay me a cent but room and board." And in coming to link her cause with the black family's, she questions her own value within white culture: "I kept figuring up how much I was worth by the hour." Ultimately Ellen will have to dissociate herself from the black ideal which she establishes in these pages because her acceptance of that ideal leads her to an even lower self-esteem, given the stereotypes of blacks which she retains.

Ellen's ironic assertion at the conclusion of the above passage that her own family would have to be "white and with

a little more money" suggests the conscious distance which she feels between herself and the black family. Gibbons, however, remains aloof from such a reversal; through narrative irony at her protagonist's expense, Gibbons here detaches herself from Ellen's return to stereotype. Where Sara Flanigan in Sudie reflects primarily Twain's sentimental disposition, Gibbons employs Twain's ironic and roughshod treatment of characters as well. The ironic distance she creates between herself and her character in the latter sections of the novel provides a critique of Ellen's eventual return to stereotyped ideology.

When her grandmother dies, leaving Ellen to find a more suitable home for herself, Ellen settles into a white foster home, from which she takes her name. But once she is finally resettled in the white community, she does not forget Starletta. Ellen remembers her friend, however, in nostalgic terms: "Lord sometimes I wish I still had Starletta" (83), she says after arriving at the home. When Ellen notices that Starletta is growing up and thus out of her control, she mourns the past like a rebel soldier come back from Appomattox: "I feel like she grew behind my back and when I think about her now I want to press my hands to her to stop her from growing into a time she will not want to play" (83). Ellen's wish that she "still had" Starletta appears innocent enough; she uses the phrase repeatedly throughout the novel, however, suggesting that the

development which she attains through her relationship with Starletta can come only at the expense of Starletta's own growth. And, given her fantasies about a return to "slavery times," as she describes Mavis's family, her words become even more suspect. "I always thought she would be little and fast forever" she muses, revealing her further fantasy that Starletta would maintain a child-like posture relative to herself. While Ellen's wish resembles her desire "to stop her growing into a time she will not want to play," her assertion that Starletta deceptively "grew behind my back" betrays the extent to which she, like Huck, ultimately values white identity over black.

Shortly after describing these longings, Ellen relates her attempt to guide her friend away from the "white boy" whom Starletta has a crush on. The passage reveals Ellen's jealousy as Starletta begins to grow away from her but also her hypocritical stance as she evaluates Starletta's motivations:

She told me during lunchtime one day she has a crush on a boy and he was a sassy old white boy. And she would not listen to me tell her she would have to pick out another boy to love.

She is very sweet on Tom the white boy. A boy is a boy to her and this is the one she decided on.

But I know Starletta is not a fool. Her body is growing fast and so is her thinking.

Nowadays you can count on her to have some things figured out for her own self. But I still know her good enough to tell what is running through her head.

It is no use to snag a colored boy she would think when the white ones are the ones that have the cars and the money to set you up in style. Why do I want to chop all day and make quilts all night? she would think. What can a colored boy bring me for a

Valentine present but some cheap candy or some paper he cut out and glued into a heart? But that white boy Tom could tell his mama to pick up something nice in town and she would put it on her account.

This is the way Starletta was thinking.

I know Starletta is getting a itch way down deep and low where a colored boy cannot afford to reach to scratch. (83-84)

Ellen's insistence that Starletta "pick out another boy" reflects the same deeply felt sense of separation between black and white that we see earlier in the novel, even as Ellen attempts to assert her closeness to her black friend. The illogic which led to Ellen's interpretation of Starletta's crush on Tom is identical to that which led Ellen to wish her ideal family to be "white and with a little more money": in this southern culture, whiteness is all. Ellen is only able to assume that her friend is being manipulative--she's "getting a itch way down deep and low where a colored boy cannot afford to reach to scratch"--rather than perceptive. Ellen jealously guards this white Tom because, like Starletta, Ellen wants for herself a white family "to set you up in style."

Upon finally arriving at the one white home in which she can be comfortable--ironically, a foster home--Ellen acknowledges her debt to Starletta by asking her "new mama" to let Starletta spend a night with her. She sees the courage which such a proposal will require: "That is brave to think about because I am not sure if it has ever been done before" (84), and yet she also immediately reveals the condescension inherent in her action: "That is something

big Starletta would never forget and she would think back on me and how she stayed in the white house all night with Ellen." Ellen still claims a superior position for herself in her relationship with Starletta, even as she maintains that she has attained moral growth through their relationship:

I wonder to myself am I the same girl who would not drink after Starletta two years ago or eat a colored biscuit when I was starved?

It is the same girl but I am old now I know it is not the germs you cannot see that slide off her lips and on to a glass then to your white lips that will hurt you or turn you colored. What you had better worry about though is the people you know and trusted they would be like you because you were all made in the same batch. You need to look over your shoulder at the one who is in charge of holding you up and see if that is a knife he has in his hand. And it might not be a colored hand. But it is a knife.

If you let somebody tell you anything else you are a fool because what I have told you is right.

Sometimes I even think I was cut out to be colored and I got bleached and sent to the wrong bunch of folks.

When I stayed with my mama's mama I made a list of all the things that I wanted my family to be and I put down white and have running water.

Now it makes me ashamed to think I said that.

All I know now is that I want Starletta in my house and if she tells me to I will lick the glass she uses just to show that I love her and her being colored is just the way she is. That is all. (84-85)

Ellen debunks the social myths of the South that support stereotyped ideology, realizing for the first time that whites represent a greater threat to her than do blacks; she acknowledges further that there is no inherent value in her white identity. Her assertions that those "made in the same batch" cannot all be trusted and that "I was cut out to be colored" represent her rejection of white culture, much like

that which we see in Sudie and, of course, much like Huck Finn's decision to "go to hell." Yet in Ellen's claim that she "will lick the glass" that Starletta uses in order to prove her love for her friend, she demonstrates precisely the same stereotype that she began the novel with when she fretted over the "colored biscuit." She is willing to sacrifice hygiene for her friend but not the claim of difference and the condescension that accompanies such a claim. Even as Ellen pronounces her newfound sensibility, she retains her white ideology of race in attempting to repay Starletta for all she has done by inviting her to stay over. Caught like Huck between white and black worlds, Ellen finally chooses the white world even as she maintains that she chooses the black: as Huck denies Jim his humanity in subjecting him to Tom Sawyer's burlesque, Ellen belittles Starletta in allowing her a visit to the big house to enjoy its splendor.

Despite such oversights on her part, Ellen can acknowledge the stereotypes which she retains. She hopes that Starletta "will remember me good when she is old enough to think and sort through her own past to see all the ways I slighted her oh not by selling her down a river or making her wash my clothes but by all the varieties of ways I felt God chose me over her" (99-100). Ellen thus identifies the literary and cultural stereotypes of the old South and rejects them while admitting to the subtler stereotypes of

the modern South. If such an acknowledgment suffers in the face of her failure to recognize the more pernicious of the stereotypes which she retains, it is a conscious acknowledgment of the inevitability of a return to stereotype on the part of Gibbons' protagonist that we do not see on the part of Twain's. Ellen's moral balancing here exposes the guilt over her own white identity which motivates her: like Huck, she is driven to goodness out of a keen sense of guilt, and her actions will likewise eventually expose that guilt as a superficial solvent.

At the conclusion of the novel we see the extent to which Ellen clings to white cultural superiority even as she claims it to be done with. Ellen apologizes outright to Starletta, regretting the ways in which she has marginalized her friend:

Starletta I always thought I was special because I was white and when I thought about you being colored I said to myself it sure is a shame Starletta's colored. I sure would hate to be that way. White people selling your mama's quilts like they do. And the three of you live in that house that's about to fall down. I always went away from your house wondering how you stood to live without a inside toilet. I know your daddy just put one in but you went a long time without one. Longer than any white folks I know. And when I thought about you I always felt glad for myself. And now I don't know why. I really don't. And I just wanted to tell you that. You don't have to say anything back. You just lay there and wait for supper.

. . . as I lay in bed and watch my Starletta fall asleep I figure that if they could fight a war over how I'm supposed to think about her then I'm obligated to do it. It seems like the decent thing to do.

I came a long way to get here but when you think about it you will see that old Starletta came even farther.

And I watch her resting now because soon we'll all be eating supper and maybe some cake tonight and I say low Starletta you sure have a right to rest.

And all this time I thought I had the hardest row to hoe.

That will always amaze me. (125-126)

She then watches Starletta sleep and decides that she can surely think of blacks in a new manner if the entire country can fight a war over their plight. At the same time that she comes to this conclusion, however, she denies Starletta the opportunity to reply to the apology she makes ("You just lay there and wait for supper") and she takes metaphoric possession of her friend in referring to her as "my Starletta," something she has done throughout the novel. Ellen looks upon Starletta, who is well into puberty, as a child, and assumes an authority over her which denies Starletta the opportunity to attain any sense of autonomy within the relationship. Despite the moral growth which Ellen so ardently claims here, she is finally unable to see Starletta as a human being in her own right. If guilt alone is sufficient remittance for Ellen Foster, it is not so for Starletta, just as it was insufficient for Twain's Jim.

iv

If Huck Finn in the recent South at times appears much like the Huck Finn of old, such is not the case in the treatment of the Huck-Jim relationship in the work of African-Americans. In my next chapter, I examine the ways

in which African-American writers in the twentieth century reject the basic tropes employed by white southern writers in portraying relationships between black and white characters such as we've seen.

CHAPTER 5
'NO MAN'S LAND':
AFRICAN-AMERICAN CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE WHITE SAINT

i

If the racially liberal impulse which leads southern white writers to portray relationships between blacks and whites frequently ends in a return to stereotype, as we see in Huck Finn, we must consider the southern African-American novelist's treatment of such relationships. The parallels between black and white characters in the novels I've considered in the past four chapters and in novels by African-American novelists writing in the same period are many: while the white liberal writer struggles with the notion that a black character can provide moral guidance for a white character, African-American writers accept this notion as a matter of course, frequently portraying the failure of whites to recognize the oppression of blacks within American culture, while focussing upon the manner in which blacks cope with that oppression. If Huck Finn must first travel a thousand miles down the Mississippi River with Jim before he decides to "go to hell" rather than return Jim to slavery, Bigger Thomas recognizes the moral inequity present in his society from the beginning of Richard Wright's novel. The ways in which blacks cope with

that inequity are at the heart of the twentieth-century African-American novel.

In The Signifying Monkey, Henry Louis Gates argues that the struggle that black writers have with the very language they employ leads them to employ the traditions of their African heritage. These writers, Gates says, "speak in standard Romance or Germanic languages and literary structures, but almost always speak with a distinct and resonant accent, an accent that Signifies (upon) the various black vernacular literary traditions, which are still being written down" (xxiii). This duality of course frustrates even as it is liberates. The language of white culture necessarily brings with it the stereotypes of that culture, and black writers of the twentieth century attempt to undo such stereotypes even as the language they use expresses it.

Color itself is of primary importance in these novels: racial identity provides self-definition for the central characters time and again in the fictions of black writers in the South from Charles Chesnutt to Alice Walker. Their protagonists work against the negative self-definition placed upon them by white stereotypes. These writers have of course themselves struggled with the stereotypes placed upon blacks by white culture. Both Jean Toomer and Chesnutt, for instance, each made a choice to "remain" black rather than "pass" as white, as their light skin would have

allowed them to do. Describing the period in which he wrote Cane, Jean Toomer wrote that his "need for artistic expression has pulled me deeper and deeper into the Negro group. As my powers of receptivity increased, I found myself loving it in a way that I could never love the other" (Kerman 97). The fiction of both men reflects the significance of this decision in their lives.

If racial identity is at the center of the African-American novel, conflict between black characters and white will of course figure prominently in it. In the following chapter, I examine the ways in which three African-American writers of the South--Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and Alice Walker--respond to, signify upon, and finally rewrite the relationship between Huck Finn and Jim in their novels. To borrow a term from Houston Baker, these black writers "repudiate" this white text, ultimately seeking to portray largely autonomous black characters removed from stereotype and to expose the condescension we have seen in so many of the white characters in the previous four chapters. If the white characters here do not always resemble Huck Finn in the position they hold relative to society, they do, like Huck, look to the black protagonists of these novels for either clemency or redemption. The African-American novelists here inflate and exaggerate Huck's character in order to reveal the condescension inherent in his role. Having gained the perspective of these black protagonists,

we see them answering in various manners the question which W. E. B. Du Bois claimed the "other world," the white world, asked of him indirectly and interminably: "How does it feel to be a problem?" (43).

ii

Chicago might appear an untoward setting for a southern novel, but Richard Wright's Native Son (1940) directly confronts the plight of blacks in the South as it examines the northern blacks who migrated from the South in the early part of the twentieth century. Indeed, the neighborhood in which Bigger Thomas lived would likely have been populated by more people born in the southern states than were born in Illinois. Wright himself attributed his inspiration for Bigger Thomas to a number of blacks whom he encountered as a child living in Mississippi, each of whom "consistently violated the Jim Crow laws of the South, at least for a sweet brief spell" (xi) in rebellion against the oppressive nature of white southern culture. And with its northern setting, Wright's text makes the implicit argument that the desperation his protagonist feels is a problem at the core of American as well as southern society.

In Native Son, Wright parallels the relationship which Twain develops between Huck and Jim in Bigger Thomas's various associations with white characters. The symbols of

white oppression abound in Bigger Thomas' world from the beginning of the novel: from the imposing billboard showing the white face of Buckley, the state's attorney who will ultimately prosecute Bigger, to the white movie stars who portray a glamorous and attractive lifestyle. Such images contrast sharply with Bigger's daily life, characterized by the one-room apartment in which his family lives. Early in the novel, Wright demonstrates Bigger's resentment of his black identity, the result of white stereotyping, when Bigger fantasizes aloud to his friend Gus that he could fly a plane like the white boys who "get a chance to do everything" (19):

"I could fly one of them things if I had a chance," Bigger mumbled reflectively, as though talking to himself.

Gus pulled down the corners of his lips, stepped out from the wall, squared his shoulders, doffed his cap, bowed low and spoke with mock deference:

"Yessuh."

"You go to hell," Bigger said, smiling.

"Yessuh," Gus said again. (20)

Gus' minstrel act here effectively counters Bigger's aspirations, yet the scene suggests the extent to which Bigger will come to reject the racial stereotype that blacks are servile which the act implies. In telling Gus to "go to hell," (ironically inverting Huck's decision to go there himself) Bigger rejects the legitimacy of the subordinate role into which the whites he encounters will attempt to place him. Yet his irony emphasizes that he is fully aware of the real implications of his friend's joke. "Let's play

white," Bigger says a page later, stressing again his actual desire for the autonomy he sees in the images of whites which surround him. Ironically, Gus chooses to be J.P. Morgan, a man quite like Mr. Dalton, for whom Bigger will soon be working. "Yessuh, Mr. Morgan," Bigger responds to Gus, mimicking his friend's own feigned minstrelsy moments after he has called it into question. Bigger concludes their play-acting by remarking bitterly, "Every time I get to thinking about me being black and they being white, me being here and they being there, I feel like something awful's going to happen to me. . . ." (23). Overtly contemplating racial difference for the first time in the novel, Bigger foresees his future.

Mr. Dalton, the first of many white saints whom Bigger will encounter in the novel, offers Bigger a job as his chauffeur. Dalton does so ostensibly out of his own sense of guilt over white oppression, for he believes his generosity will allow Bigger to rise out of the poverty in which he and his family find themselves. As Bigger will discover in the course of the novel, however, Dalton is part owner of the apartment complex that is the very symbol of Bigger's poverty from the opening of the novel. As his sense of his own black identity becomes more distinct, Bigger will come to reject such hypocrisy.

In his portrayal of the Dalton family, Wright exposes the hypocrisy and duplicity attached to benevolence on the part

of whites: Bigger comes to see Mr. Dalton's charity as a false and misdirected pity. Likewise Mrs. Dalton, who wishes to give Bigger an education, is both literally and metaphorically blind to his need to be treated without condescension. It is their daughter, Mary, however, who most perplexes Bigger through her apparently genuine demonstration of concern for Bigger and for blacks generally.

Mary surprises Bigger from the moment he meets her because she so upsets his expectations of a white woman. Ironically, Bigger resents Mary precisely for her ability to break out of his stereotype of whites. When she asks him in front of her father whether or not he is a union member, Bigger frets that she will upset the subservient role he has assumed with Mr. Dalton: "She's making me lose my job! he thought. Goddamn! . . . what did she mean by talking to him this way in front of Mr. Dalton, who, surely, didn't like unions" (53). And when Mary leaves him alone with her father, Bigger is further confused: "He had never seen anyone like her before. She was not a bit the way he had imagined she would be" (54). But if he is at all hopeful at the outset of the relationship, Bigger will quickly lash out at the condescension in what he perceives as Mary's eccentric behavior. When Mary introduces Bigger to Jan, her friend in the Communist Party, Bigger's frustration and discomfort only increase, and he becomes "very conscious of

his black skin" (67) and of his own black identity: "Did not white people despise a black skin? . . . they made him feel his black skin by just standing there looking at him, one holding his hand and the other smiling." Bigger "felt he had no physical existence at all" in the presence of Jan and Mary, and his animosity for the two grows as he perceives condescension in their benevolence:

he was something he hated, the badge of shame which he knew was attached to a black skin. It was a shadowy region, a No Man's Land, the ground that separated the white world from the black that he stood upon. He felt naked, transparent; he felt that this white man, having helped to put him down, having helped to deform him, held him up now to look at him and be amused. At that moment he felt toward Mary and Jan a dumb, cold, and inarticulate hate. (67-68)

Bigger is ironically more keenly aware of his black identity here when he is confronted by characters like Huck Finn in their apparently genuine compassion than he was previously in confronting Mr. Dalton, a meeting in which he was easily able to slip into the stereotype that Dalton expects of him. Wright repudiates Twain and Huck's apparent moral development in his portrayal of Bigger's relationship with Jan and Mary. Bigger's awareness of his black identity leads him to a "no man's land" in which he feels isolated and threatened, a locale vastly different from the raft of Mark Twain and Huck Finn.

Here, as throughout the novel, we are wholly in Bigger Thomas' consciousness, and through that consciousness we gain a fuller sense of the black character's response to the

false compassion of whites than we had in any of the novels I consider in previous chapters. Like the novel's early readers, we see for the first time the terror with which the black character enters into such a union.

Jan's vision of a world in which "there'll be no white and no black; there'll be no rich and no poor" (69) is a fantasy Bigger cannot afford because his reality is so stark in comparison to Mary and Jan's. Mary immediately attempts to demonstrate her understanding of that reality when she asks Bigger which restaurant they might go to: "We want to go to a real place," she says, meaning that she and Jan want to go to a restaurant frequented by blacks. Mary thus ironically establishes the very divisions which Jan has just claimed might someday not exist. For Bigger, of course, tourists like Mary and Jan cannot understand the world he lives in, nor his black identity: Mary thus further reveals the duplicitous nature of her sympathy for Bigger and unwittingly distances herself from him even as she attempts to gain his trust. When they arrive at the restaurant, Jan's attempts to appropriate black speech likewise cast him in a condescending position:

The waitress brought the beer and chicken.

"This is simply grand!" Mary exclaimed.

"You got something there," Jan said, looking at Bigger.

"Did I say that right, Bigger?"

Bigger hesitated.

"That's the way they say it," he spoke flatly. (73)

Mary's regal language ("simply grand!") contrasts with Jan's mimicry of black speech and belies his intentions. Sensing

Jans's affectation, Bigger detaches himself from the two with his cool response. Further, he refuses to allow his own experience to be appropriated as Jan would have it: he does not count himself as one of the blacks who would "say it" that way.

Jan and Mary fully disclose the stereotypes they maintain as they encourage Bigger to join with them in the Communist Party. Mary reveals her desire to work in the black community to be based in the same rationale that led her to want to go to a "real place" to eat:

"... I want to work among Negroes. That's where people are needed. It seems as though they've been pushed out of everything."

"That's true."

"When I see what they've done to those people, it makes me so mad...."

"Yes; it's awful."

And I feel so helpless and useless. I want to do something."

"I knew all along you'd come through."

Say, Jan, do you know many Negroes? I want to meet some."

"I don't know any very well. But you'll meet them when you're in the Party."

"They have so much emotion! What a people! If we could ever get them going...."

"We can't have a revolution without 'em," Jan said.

"They've got to be organized. They've got spirit. They'll give the Party something it needs."

"And their songs--the spirituals! Aren't they marvelous?" Bigger saw her turn to him. "Say, Bigger, can you sing?"

"I can't sing," he said. (76)

Mary reveals the stereotypical thinking which she embraces through her false compassion. Wright undermines these white saints--and indeed the whole notion of a white saint--with his ironic humor which exposes Mary's naivete: "Say, Jan, do

you know many Negroes?" That both Mary and Jan ignore Bigger as Mary contemplates working "among Negroes" furthers Wright's comic intent. As Mary and Jan unwittingly force blacks into a stereotyped position as entertainers possessed of "so much emotion," Wright deftly portrays the couple as inverted minstrel figures, to whom Bigger plays straight man with his response: "I can't sing."

If the white characters in the novels I've examined in the previous four chapters see blacks as human beings in their own right in order to free themselves of guilt and retain their own humanity, Bigger Thomas here denies Mary Dalton her humanity in order to gain his own. Even after killing Mary and burning her body in the Daltons' furnace, he remains cold: "He did not feel sorry for Mary; she was not real to him, not a human being...." (106). In seeking a "real place" through Bigger, Mary established herself as a fraud for him. As he tells Boris Max later in the novel, Bigger feels that justice is served when he kills Mary: "For a little while I was free," he says, "I was doing something. It was wrong, but I was feeling all right.... I been scared and mad all my life and after I killed that first woman, I wasn't scared no more for a little while" (329). He was "feeling all right," he says, and we are reminded of Huck Finn, for whom feeling right is a guiding principle. Like Huck, he feels so after making a decision to go to a white

hell, but unlike Twain's protagonist, he will not be able to slip out of the responsibilities of such a decision.

Bigger comes to see his act as a means of attaining the power which he so admired earlier in the images of whites surrounding him: "He felt that he had his destiny in his grasp. He was more alive than he could ever remember having been; his mind and attention were pointed, focussed toward a goal" (141). This focus brings Bigger to a rebirth in which "he was moving toward that sense of fullness he had so often but inadequately felt in magazines and movies. . . . His being black and at the bottom of the world was something which he could take with a new-born strength" (141). Bigger Thomas overpowers the white condescension he confronts early in his novel through his brutal act, and in so doing he empowers himself. His violent contact with whites thus provides him with choices that he had previously lacked.

In jail, after his arrest for killing Mary and his own friend Bessie, Bigger objects to Boris Max's presence for reasons similar to those that he gave earlier as he objected to Mary and Jan: "Bigger felt that he was sitting and holding his life helplessly in his hands, waiting for Max to tell him what to do with it; and it made him hate himself" (319). As he earlier disputed the assumptions that Jan and Mary made of him, he here objects to the passive position into which Max places him. Bigger stereotypes Max in this regard, assuming that Max will resemble the other whites

whom he has known. When Max asks "Do you trust me, Bigger?" he asks a question the white protagonists I've considered above have taken for granted. Rather than begrudgingly coming to see Bigger as an individual, Max immediately sees his client as an individual within a larger framework. Wright portrays Bigger's decision to trust Max as an act of faith, underscoring the integral nature of such relationships to American society and, of course, to Wright's novel: "If he expressed belief in Max, if he acted on that belief, would it not end just as all other commitments of faith had ended? He wanted to believe; but was afraid" (321). If Bigger cannot immediately make the leap of faith required of him, it is because he feels cut off from his own identity as a black man: "as always, when a white man talked to him he was caught out in No Man's Land" (321). Bigger eventually loses such trepidation, however, when Max recounts Bigger's plight as Bigger himself has never been able to do.

In the courtroom and prison scenes with which the novel concludes, we see a further extension of the pattern which Twain established. Max pleads with the judge, reminding him that the fate of white society is bound up with that of black society: "I ask in the name of all we are and believe, that you spare this boy's life! . . . I beg this in order that not only may this black boy live, but that we ourselves may not die! (371)" Max's appeal to the white

judge parallels Huck Finn's realization that he must "go to hell" in order to feel right, and Max's words remind the reader that Wright does not rely on the chimerical pattern in which a black character is unjustly imprisoned--a pattern which, as we've seen, allows the reader to valorize both the imprisoned black character and the white savior with little scrutiny--rather, Wright, through Bigger Thomas, compels the reader to examine the specific realities of the confrontation of black and white in the context of an actual crime against white society.

Bigger realizes that he has "flung into their faces his feeling of being black" and it is this feeling Wright in like manner flings into the face of the reader. As if to audit the white reader, throughout the novel we see Bigger reading his story in the white Chicago newspapers, a subtle allusion on Wright's part to his effort to undermine and repudiate the "white" texts which come before his own: "His eyes ran over the paper, looking for some clue that would tell him something of his fate" (316).

In his conclusion, Wright again repudiates the pattern that we've seen in Huckleberry Finn and its southern descendants by mirroring that pattern and furnishing Bigger Thomas with sufficient insight to see, as Jim never can, that he has been abandoned by his white counterpart. Shortly after Max comes to the prison and attempts to gain Bigger's trust, he tries to link his own cause with

Bigger's. Bigger objects to Max that most white people
 "hate black folks":

"Why, Bigger?

"I don't know, Mr. Max."

"Bigger, don't you know that they hate others, too?"

"Who they hate?"

"They hate trade unions. They hate folks who try to
 organize. They hate Jan."

"But they hate black folks more than they hate unions,"
 Bigger said. "They don't treat union folks like they
 treat me."

"Oh, yes, they do. You think that because your color
 makes it easy for them to point you out, segregate you,
 exploit you. But they do that to others, too. They hate
 me because I'm trying to help you. They're writing me
 letters, calling me a 'dirty Jew.'" (322)

As Huck joins his cause with Jim's, Max here joins with
 Bigger. Max then announces to the white faces in the
 courtroom "I shall witness for Bigger Thomas," and his
 impassioned speeches in defense of Bigger resemble the
 eloquent passage in Huck Finn in which Huck decides to "go
 to hell."

But even Boris Max returns Bigger to stereotype: at the
 end of the novel, Max utterly forgets the extent to which
 Bigger suffers after he is sentenced to die. Max can only
 tell Bigger that "men die alone," acknowledging that he,
 too, can no longer fully communicate with Bigger. Bigger,
 however, urgently tries to get Max to understand him--and
 his crime--as Max had before: "'I didn't want to kill!'
 Bigger shouted. 'But what I killed for I am! It must've
 been pretty deep in me to make me kill! I must have felt it
 awful hard to murder'" (392). Max lifts his hand to touch
 Bigger in sympathy but pulls back: "'No; no; no. . . .

Bigger, not that. . . .' Max pleaded despairingly" (392). If Max had earlier been able to understand Bigger's motives for killing, at the end of the novel, he cannot. Bigger recognizes that Max has become but another white man who is incapable of fully comprehending him: "Max groped for his hat like a blind man" (392).

Thus Wright, at the end of his novel, employs the same pattern that we've seen in the novels of so many white southerners. In so doing, he undermines the apparent benevolence of a character such as Huck Finn by exposing the condescension associated with that benevolence. Max's betrayal of Bigger here resembles Huck's betrayal of Jim except that here, it is not the writer's unconscious subplot but his point. Unlike Jim, Wright's Bigger Thomas demonstrates a complete awareness of the extent to which he is being forsaken, an awareness we see after Bigger says good-bye to Max, in the novel's final sardonic image of Bigger: "He held still on to the bars. Then he smiled a faint, wry, bitter smile. He heard the ring of steel against steel as a far door clanged shut" (392).

iii

In Invisible Man (1952), Ralph Ellison directly contests Mark Twain's portrayal of the relationship between Huck Finn and Jim, and, like Richard Wright, Ellison repudiates

Twain's text by focussing particularly upon the fraudulent nature of white benevolence. From the infamous "Battle Royale" forward, Ellison calls into question the sincerity of such goodwill toward the black community. Through the eyes of his narrator, we see repeated examinations of white characters resembling Huck Finn and likewise the repeated failure of such white characters to conceive of their relationships with the narrator in any terms beyond stereotype.

In the second chapter of his novel, Ellison establishes a Huck-Jim relationship in joining the narrator with Mr. Norton, a benefactor of the college which the narrator attends. The narrator chauffeurs Mr. Norton through the countryside surrounding the college, emphasizing the servile role he must play in deference to this white philanthropist. Ellison calls into question the relevance of Twain's model when Mr. Norton claims that his fate is bound together with the narrator's, even as he orders the narrator about:

So you see, young man, you are involved in my life quite intimately, even though you've never seen me before. You are bound to a great dream and to a beautiful monument. If you become a good farmer, a chef, a preacher, doctor, singer, mechanic--whatever you become, and even if you fail, you are my fate. And you must write me and tell me the outcome. (43-44)

Mr. Norton proposes much the same thesis here as does Twain in Huck Finn or Faulkner in Go Down, Moses: the white character can only achieve a positive moral identity through his relationship with a black man and through his resultant

confrontation with the ghosts of his oppressive forefathers. But Ellison renders such a proposition absurd. The "dream" to which the narrator is "bound" is Norton's alone, as is the "monument," which calls to mind the national monument for which the narrator will later mix drops of invisible black paint with buckets of white paint. If Norton outwardly claims a moral kinship with the narrator, the narrator will soon see just how superficial--and outrageous--the claim is. And even as he claims such kinship, of course, Mr. Norton retains his own patriarchal identity.

As he will do throughout the text, the narrator points to the irony of such a relationship through his own naive response. "You are important because if you fail I have failed by one individual, one defective cog," Mr. Norton claims--ironically failing to see the narrator as an individual by tying his individuality to a "cog," which has none--and the narrator thinks in response, "But you don't even know my name" (45). Such fleeting relationships which the narrator will form throughout Invisible Man force him to see the extent to which he is invisible in this society. While he cannot see himself as Jim--as a one-dimensional minstrel figure--the white characters with whom he comes in contact constantly ask him to assume such a role. In Huckleberry Finn, Mark Twain attempts to set Huck free of the enslavement of a hypocritical social conscience through his relationship with Jim, whereas Ralph Ellison in

Invisible Man must expose not only the failings of the social conscience of white Americans but also of the literary relationships which exemplify that conscience.

Later in the novel, having left the college in apparent disgrace, the narrator attempts to find work with the elusive Mr. Emerson. Emerson's son, however, intervenes, and he turns out to be a would-be descendant of Huck Finn. Ellison signifies upon Twain's text in his novel in order to demonstrate how inappropriate the model finally is:

"Look," he said, his face working violently, "I was trying to tell you that I know many things about you--not you personally, but fellows like you. Not much either, but still more than the average. With us it's still Jim and Huck Finn. . . . Please don't misunderstand me; I don't say all of this to impress you. Or to give myself some kind of sadistic catharsis. Truly, I don't. But I do know this world you're trying to contact--all its virtues and all its unspeakables--Ha, yes, unspeakables. I'm afraid my father considers me one of the unspeakables. . . I'm Huckleberry, you see. . ." (187-188)

Alan Nadel observes that Emerson's declaration--"I'm Huckleberry"--immediately tips off the reader to his duplicity: the only character in Twain's novel to use Huck's full name is Miss Watson, who single-handedly represents all hypocritical religious fervor and ignorance. Miss Watson or no, the narrator will have no such identity put upon him: "He laughed drily as I tried to make sense of his ramblings. Huckleberry? Why did he keep talking about that kid's story?" Nor will he allow Emerson to plead "innocence" in the Huck Finn mode: "Aren't you curious about what lies behind the face of things?" Emerson asks. "Yes, sir," the

narrator replies, "but I'm mainly interested in a job." The narrator consciously rejects the white liberal's perception of the relationship between well-meaning whites and destitute blacks. Likewise, Ellison rejects the trope that Twain established for him in Huckleberry Finn.

In like manner, Ellison's portrayal of Sybil, the white woman who attempts to seduce the narrator toward the conclusion of the novel, reveals the writer's outright rejection of white condescension. As in the earlier scenes, Ellison undermines the role of the white saint by reducing it to the absurd. Sybil claims that she wants the narrator to rape her because she has always heard that this is what black men do to white women:

"Well ever since I first heard about it, even when I was a very little girl, I've wanted it to happen to me."

"You mean what happened to your friend?"

"Uh huh."

"Good Lord, Sybil, did you ever tell that to anyone else?"

"Of course not, I wouldn't've dared. Are you shocked?"

"Some. But Sybil, why do you tell me?"

"Oh, I know that I can trust you. I just knew you'd understand; you're not like other men. We're kind of alike." (520)

Again the narrator finds himself back-pedaling from the advance of yet another Huck Finn: like young Emerson, Sybil assumes a trust which the narrator is unwilling to enter into because of the condescension and stereotype implied by it. Sybil imagines a bond between the two ("we're kind of alike") much like that which Huck Finn assumes when he

escapes Jackson's Island with Jim, yet Ellison makes clear that any such bond is based in the white character's mind.

The bond is impossible for the narrator, who, unlike Jim, has choices in such matters: Ellison implies that Sybil's stereotype is an ironic emotional rape of the narrator. The message which the narrator later scrawls on Sybil's body-- "SYBIL YOU WERE RAPED BY SANTA CLAUS"--demonstrates his recognition of the absurdity implicit in Sybil's stereotypical fantasy of black behavior: the myth she believes is as fraudulent as the myth of Santa Claus. Like Wright before him, Ellison chooses the ultimate taboo of southern society--sex between a black man and a white woman--to undermine the stereotypes of that society.

Ellison's narrator elects to set his own course rather than allow a white man, or anyone, to set it for him. Neither will he assume the responsibility of being the "fate" of another character. At the end, the narrator concludes that he must stake out his own identity, free of the stereotypes which both the white and black communities place upon him:

I had no longer to run for or from the Jacks and the Emersons and the Bledsoes and Nortons, but only from their confusion, impatience, and refusal to recognize the beautiful absurdity of their American identity and mine. . . . I knew that it was better to live out one's own absurdity than to die for that of others, whether for Ras's or Jack's (546-547).

While accepting the notion of an "American identity," the narrator here declares that identity to be his own. The

American identity at which he arrives is of course not one of racial unity but instead of individualism, much like that which Huck Finn claims for himself at the end of his novel. Ellison's novel thus parallels Huckleberry Finn in that the black character does indeed become an individual. But the narrator does not finally require that his life be validated by the presence of another character, black or white. Becoming an individual is for Ellison a process which comes not from external relationships but instead from internal response to them. In this manner, his novel repudiates the myth-making of Huck Finn and Ellison claims an autonomy for his black protagonist beyond that attained by the black characters in the southern novels examined in my first four chapters.

Alice Walker's Meridian (1976) examines relationships between blacks and whites in the South in the midst of the civil rights movement. Walker's protagonist, Meridian Hill, achieves growth in the novel through her awareness of the possibility of change in southern race relations. Likewise, Lynne Rabinowitz, a white college student in the South to

help register black voters, develops through her increasing awareness of black culture and through her attempts to cross racial barriers. Like Wright's Dalton and Ellison's Emerson, Lynne's central tension is her inability to escape the condescension which goes hand-in-hand with her white identity. Like Ellison, Walker undermines such condescension by demonstrating the extent to which Lynne is ultimately self-serving and insincere.

Soon after she decides to stay in the South when other white civil rights workers from the North are returning home, Lynne marries a black man, Truman Held, with whom Meridian had earlier been involved. Lynne finds that she is perfectly comfortable in the black community, but she stereotypes that community in much the same way that Mary Dalton stereotypes Bigger Thomas in Native Son. As Mary had looked for a "real place" in the black community, Lynne finds a special grace in that community which is lacking among whites: "black people had a unique beauty, a kind of last-gasp loveliness, which, in other races, had already become extinct" (157). Her primitivist perspective of blacks will lead her into conflict with both Meridian and Truman, who each come to sense the condescension which accompanies such stereotypes.

Indeed, from the time they meet, Meridian is suspicious of Lynne's motivations for participating in the civil rights

movement in the South, for Lynne condescends to the blacks whom she claims to be supporting:

To Lynne, the black people of the South were Art. This she begged forgiveness for and tried to hide, but it was no use. To her eyes, used to Northern suburbs where every house looked sterile and identical even before it was completely built..., the people usually stamped with the seals of their profession; to her...the South--and the black people living there--was Art. The songs, the dances, the food, the speech. Oh! She was such a romantic, so in love with the air she breathed, the honeysuckle that grew just beyond the door. (130)

Lynne's vision of blacks is wrapped up in her vision of the South--much like Elizabeth Spencer's, as we see in the preface to The Voice at the Back Door--and Walker reveals the central paradox of Lynne's role as a white saint in Lynne's contradicting desires to help the black community gain political power even as she idealizes that community as "Art."

In Truman Held, Walker demonstrates both black attraction and repulsion for the altruism of white characters who like Huck Finn valorize themselves for simply acknowledging the humanity of a black character. Early in their relationship, Lynne's benevolence draws Truman to her: he is first attracted to Lynne when he finds that she "longed to put her body on the line for his freedom. How her idealism had warmed him, brought him into the world, made him eager to tuck her under his wing, under himself, sheltering her from her own illusions" (140). Unlike Twain's Jim, Truman has sufficient intellect to recognize the false nature of

Lynne's "idealism" even as he is attracted to her for such a viewpoint.

In the course of the novel, Truman grows to resent Lynne's pitying demeanor, however, and, like his friend Tommy Olds, he believes that Lynne, by being white "was guilty of whiteness" (133). Tommy Olds eventually convinces Truman that Lynne is nothing more than a "white bitch," and in short order Truman leaves Lynne to spend increasing amounts of time with Meridian. Tommy soon comes to Lynne's house and brutally rapes her. "You knows I can't hep myself" (158) he says, mocking the stereotypes of blacks which he sees in her condescension toward the black community. Tommy only becomes more angry when Lynne panders to him: when Lynne "knew she could force him from her" (159), she does not, "instead thinking of his feelings, of his hardships, of the way he was black and belonged to people without hope." Her white identity leads her to accept rape to atone for "her own guilt," and the pity which Tommy senses in this sense of guilt leads him to attempt to further humiliate her in bringing three friends to her house the next day.

When they arrive, Lynne continues to think of herself as "as a sacrifice to black despair" (161). Yet Tommy's companions are the first to overcome such stereotypical assumptions about relationships between black and white: "Go on," said Tommy Odds. 'Have some of it.'" But Altuna

Jones replies "'It? It?.... What it you talking about? That ain't no it, that's Lynne.'" In recognizing Lynne as an individual, Altuna ironically enables her to see Tommy outside of her stereotypes of blacks, and she realizes that her stereotype of blacks as passive sufferers is mistaken: "she had not been thinking of individual lives, of young men like Tommy Odds whose thin defense against hatred broke down under personal assault" (162). But, like Mary Agnes in Sara Flanigan's Sudie, Lynne has merely traded one stereotype for another. Blacks who are no longer wholly passive in Lynne's view become instead sadistic rapists in reaction against white oppression. Walker undermines Lynne's benevolence in portraying her inability to look at blacks free of white guilt: Lynne's thinking inevitably ends in the stereotypes to which that guilt leads her. Lynne's attraction to blacks is thus finally revealed to be an expression of her own self-hatred, and, ironically, like so many characters in the African-American novel of this century, she hates the color of her own skin.

Walker emphasizes Lynne's failure to escape stereotypes of blacks in Lynne's desire to return to a world in which blacks are docile and accommodating. In the nights after Tommy Odds rapes her, she sits at her house with local men:

Some nights when she became lonely to the point of suicide, she played checkers with Alonzo, Altuna's brother, who worked at the scrap yard. A man who appeared completely unaware of the Movement and who never had any interest in voting, marching or anything else, he treated her with the stiff, sober courtesy of old-time

Negroes. For his kindness, she invited him to sleep with her. In his gratitude, he licked her from her earlobes to her toes. (165)

Lynne invites Alonzo to sleep with her "for his kindness," a kindness associated with her original stereotypes of "old-time Negroes," and it is apparent that she clings to her stereotypes of blacks as passive and acquiescent.

At the novel's end, Meridian comes to Lynne after Lynne has lost the child she had with Truman. The bond they establish allows them to experience one another free of the petty jealousies they have felt before and free of the stereotypes they had previously held: "They waited for the pain of Camara's death to lessen. They waited to ask forgiveness of each other. They waited until they could talk again" (174). In her conversation with Meridian, Lynne rejects her own white identity in accepting Meridian's view of the world. When Meridian declares to Lynne that she "tried very hard not to hate you" (175), Lynne admits that her relationship with Meridian is of great importance to her and that she no longer has the option to return to white society because, through her relationship with Meridian and other blacks in the South, she has come to see the ills of that society: "I can't go back home. I don't even have a home. I wouldn't go back if I could. I know white folks are evil and fucked up, I know they're doomed. But where does that leave me?" Ironically, it leaves her precisely opposite Twain's Jim in terms of her racial identity. Like

Jim she is completely dependent upon the protagonist of the novel and she will be swiftly discarded by that protagonist--and by Walker--when her character no longer suits the plot. Lynne's rejection of her white identity here ironically parallels Huck Finn's assumption at the end of his novel that Jim is "white inside:" as Jim loses his black identity in Twain's novel, Lynne here must lose her white identity in order to gain Meridian's favor.

Once she rejects her white identity, Lynne is able to see the black community free of her earlier primitivist perspective. She admits her newfound awareness that "black folks aren't so special" (181), and, in making such a recognition, Lynne escapes the literary stereotypes associated with the white characters we see in my first four chapters: in seeing blacks as human beings capable of the full ranges of human characteristics, she removes blacks from the pedestal she has heretofore kept them on. As John F. Callahan argues, "From her naive and sinister view of black folks as Art, she comes to regard them as varied, variable human beings whose responses to experience differ from both her dreams and her nightmares" (170). Having voided her white identity, she is now able to see the black characters she encounters as individuals. In Walker's portrayal of Lynne we see Twain's literary stereotyping reversed: Walker reduces her white character to a single dimension. Like Twain's Jim, Walker's Lynne is fawning and

subservient throughout the novel. And if Lynne's denial of her own identity reminds of Huck's denial of Jim's black identity, Walker views such stereotypes as necessary to debunk stereotypes of the past.

In Meridian, Alice Walker examines stereotype from numerous perspectives; she achieves a portrait of the modern South which holds up many of the literary/racial stereotypes that we have discussed here even as it employs them. Ironically, Lynne becomes a figure much closer to Jim than to Huck, but in the process of such a portrayal, Walker thoroughly undermines the role of Mark Twain's white saint.

v

Arnold Rampersad contends that Huck Finn is "nearer than any other work of fiction" to the "fountainhead" of black American literature, Du Bois' The Souls of Black Folk (52). He argues further that Twain, "in his depiction of alienation in an American context, prominently including race, anticipates aspects" of the major African-American writers of the twentieth century. Like black fiction in this century, for Rampersad, Twain exposes "a moral dilemma, or moral inversion. . . at the heart of southern, and, by inference, American society" (51). Twain's influence ironically extends beyond the very racial boundaries which, as I argue above, his novel does something to establish.

The African-American novelist in the South often defines the black experience in the South and in America by portraying the horror of a black individual's existence at the hands of whites, examining essentially the same moral dilemma that Mark Twain confronts in Huckleberry Finn. These novelists frequently appear to address themselves to a white audience, and their final question for that audience is much like that of the narrator in Invisible Man: "Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?"

CHAPTER 6
'THE REAL, PRESENT SOUTH':
NEW VISIONS

1

Finally, I look to two contemporary novels by white southerners which actively undermine the pattern Twain established even as they reflect it: Edisto by Padgett Powell and Can't Quit You, Baby by Ellen Douglas. Both novels subvert and rework Huckleberry Finn in a variety of ways, recasting Huck's role and calling it into question as their white protagonists develop though relationships with black characters.

Some of the growth away from Twain's pattern comes out of the civil rights movement and a heightened consciousness on the part of white writers of black identity. In the title story of Terry Southern's Red-Dirt Marijuana, for instance, a white child, Harold, first learns to smoke marijuana from C.K., an older black man. Harold resists C.K.'s offer at first: "It feel good," C.K. says, to which Harold replies, "I awready feel good!" (9). But if Harold initially resists Huck Finn's credo, he eventually agrees to turn on. Harold, like the protagonists of the two novels I consider in this

chapter, is learning to be hip. After smoking with C.K., instead of returning to his white world, Harold sits with C.K. in the apparent bliss of their transformed relationship. The narrative concludes with the two characters joined together, unlike any of the conclusions in my first four chapters. At the end, the two resemble Huck and Jim, but they are not returning to a prejudiced southern society: "You wanta go fishin'?" (14) Harold asks C.K. C.K. responds, simply: "Shoot, that sound like a good idee." C.K. and Harold, unlike Huck and Jim, look at one another as equals at the initial end of their narrative.

In like fashion, the novels I consider here part with the pattern of Huckleberry Finn in that the engagement of blacks in them is significantly developed: though both novels employ various stereotypes of their black characters, at the conclusion of both the white protagonist does not evade knowledge of the distinct character of the primary black character.

Yet even here the break with Twain is not complete: indeed, Terry Southern wrote a companion piece to "Red-Dirt Marijuana" called "Razor-Fight" in which C.K. and Harold visit a black bar (ironically called "Paradise") where C.K. dies in a razor fight with his brother. Returning to his parents, Harold cries with grief, "not the tears he had known before, but tears of the first bewildering sorrow" (32). Such a violent lurch into adulthood is beyond that

which Huck Finn attains, of course, and perhaps a part of Harold's grief is for his white creator's inability to portray C.K. outside of the stereotypes imparted by the razor fight. And so, even as the vision of southern writers changes significantly--as we see in "Red-Dirt Marijuana"--such change is accompanied by a measure of the old.

ii

In an early manuscript of Padgett Powell's Edisto (1984), Huckleberry Perry, the coyly-named narrator, encourages the reader to be mindful of the literary relationship between Powell's novel and Twain's classic. In the first pages of the manuscript, Huckleberry attempts to persuade his mother to introduce him to her latest suitor, another in a weary line of men for whom Huckleberry has established the generic sobriquet of "coroner." Amidst his protagonist's comic interjection, Powell carefully delineates his literary obligations and conceits, overtly praising Twain and commenting upon the motifs his novel shares with Twain's:

Whether she ever includes the detail that I am her son, I don't know. I put my name into the scene so that she might have to mention the relationship. 'Huckleberry Perry' I say to him, stepping up like to address a business associate or something, and I know that she will have to tell her intent on naming me Huck. I don't mind the name once I have read the book twice and see what a marvel he and Clemens really are, and I think sometimes that if the world were still navigable by raft and not obfuscating slavery I could do well to find me a Jim and haul ass. The way it is, though, who can tell who's the slave, who's got faith, who's a homosexual ala Fiedler,

so forth, who knows what in God's name is proved by running and who can say what direction any movement would be in? (1)

Alas for my thesis, but the better for the novel, Powell substantially alters the passage in his final draft, omitting reference to Twain or Huck Finn. Powell new Huck takes on an ironic and aristocratic appellation, Simons Everson Manigault. Still, we see in this passage an overt acknowledgment of a contemporary writer's debt to Twain. Powell concedes the conscious relationship between his work and Huck Finn, isolating the relationship between Huck and Jim in particular in his reference to Fiedler's "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!" Powell addresses the particular literary stereotypes of the South, and throughout Edisto, he confronts racial identity and stereotype while surmounting the particular literary parameters established by Twain. If Simons never finally hauls ass, he does find his Jim to guide him as he seeks a secure sense of his own identity.

In the course of the novel, twelve-year-old Simons ("It's pronounced 'Simmons.' I'm a rare one-m Simons"[4].) must choose between the white world represented by his patrician father and the black world which his mother, an English professor, pushes him toward. At the outset, Simons lives with his mother--he refers to her as "The Doctor"--in Edisto, a secluded area of the South Carolina coast. The Doctor wants Simons to become a writer and consequently

encourages him to frequent a local black bar called the Baby Grand to gain experience. Taurus, a process server of mixed race, agrees to become the Doctor's regular servant after he frightens off Theenie, the regular servant, whose daughter Taurus is seeking in order to serve her a subpoena. Taurus quickly becomes a role model and father figure for Simons; Simons develops more swiftly in his relationship with Taurus than he has through his relationship with either of his parents.

Simons first encounters Taurus immediately after Simons has fallen out of the open emergency door of his school bus, a mishap he blames upon his mother's insistence that he find his material for writing among the blacks in Edisto: "That's what being a 'material' hound will get you: little you who should be up in the front with the nice kids but are in the back listening to Gullah and watching, say, an eight-year-old smoke marijuana like a man in a cell block" (6). His assumptions about black and white identity reveal his rejection of the assignment his mother has given him, and only Taurus' intervention here maintains his interest in the project: among the "Negroes from nowhere" who stare down at him as he lies at the base of the oak tree that stopped his fall, Taurus' "calm light face" peers at him. If the Doctor's assignment has led him into this awkward position, it has also led him to Taurus, an unexpected result that he will come to appreciate, specifically because Taurus shows

him how to bridge gaps between white and black cultures while maintaining an objective distance from both.

Simons first becomes aware that Taurus is causing a stir in Edisto when he observes that Theenie has failed to properly fold the linen, an oversight which leads him to recall the southern traditions which his mother carries on within the house, a "Southern barony" reduced "to a tract of clay roads cut in a feathery herbaceous jungle of deerfly for stock and scrub oak for crop, and the great house is a model beach house resembling a pagoda, and the planter's wife is abandoned by the planter" (9). In the midst of such decay, the Doctor insists upon a moral order paralleling the antebellum South in her control of Theenie: "that vestigial baroness insists that vestigial slave do her one duty right--'the linen,' all that remains of cotton finery. Theenie vacuums the house too, but that doesn't signify as Preserving the South" (10). Simons' concern with his southern heritage burdens him throughout the novel, much as Huck's participation in white southern culture frustrates him. This is particularly so in his relationship with Taurus, who becomes Theenie's stand-in after he chases her off. Taurus, however, is no "vestigial slave": he is in fact beyond the pale of Simons' understanding of race and culture. His counsel will lead Simons to a new understanding of himself outside of southern culture, white or black.

The night after his fall from the bus, Simons and his mother are at home when Taurus comes looking for Theenie:

Elbows on the drain counter, I am keeping the weight off my ribs and watching the food cook when I see him. You do not know what in hell may be out here on a hoodoo coast and I do not make a move. What follows is not nearly so ominous as I would sound. He don't ax-murder us or anything like that. Yet there is something arresting about this dude the moment you see him. He is shimmery as an islander's god and solid as a butcher. I consider him to be the thing that the Negroes are afraid of when they paint the doors and windows of their shacks purple or yellow. His head is cocked, his hand on the washtub of the doctor's old wringer, its manila rolling pins swung out to the side. When he comes up to the screen, I know I have seen his face before. (8)

The stereotypes in which Simons first identifies Taurus recall Huck's stereotyped thinking of Jim: recall that the first time Huck actively seeks out Jim, he wants his fortune told. Here, Simons associates Taurus with the voodoo of local blacks ("out here on a hoodoo coast"), already aligning himself with black culture in Edisto. Yet he likewise reveals his fear of that which frightens him within that culture in associating it with the more conventionally white "hell." Simons' description of Taurus as "shimmery as an islander's god and solid as a butcher" reveals both the stereotyped view he takes of Taurus and the trepidation attending such stereotypes. Such contradictions catch Simons in a stasis ("I do not make a move") much like that in which he will find himself through the early sections of the novel, as he comes to know Taurus. In eventually escaping such stasis, he will quickly shed the stereotypes with which he here describes Taurus.

Hanging out at the Baby Grand ("where I am a celebrity because I'm white" [8]), Simons has come to the conclusion that, for the black men at the bar, "life is a time when you get pleasure until somebody get your ass." Such is Simons' perception of the black world that the Doctor pushes him toward, and, through his relationship with Taurus, if he will not overcome such primitivist stereotypes--indeed, he will arrive at a whole system of such stereotypes for both black and white--he will come to see Taurus as an individual outside of stereotype. In so doing, Simons will create a position for himself in the world much like Taurus's, a position in between white and black worlds, from which vantage point he can freely observe both cultures. Taurus guides Simons in a way that neither his parents nor the men at the Baby Grand are able: "He was somebody you figured knew something. And he was supposed, as Theenie would have put it, to 'rescure' me" (33). A willing victim, Simons concludes that, with his world in turmoil due to impending divorce and a failing southern barony, "the center of the storm, calm as it was, was Taurus" (102). As we have seen above, the black character provides a moral measure for white society that the society cannot provide itself.

Once Simons realizes toward the end of the novel that he and Taurus must soon part ways, Simons invites Taurus to go fishing: "Before you go off to the middle of nowhere we better go fishing, to ratify our experience together" (119).

The experience they ratify is of course their existence in the modern South as Huck Finn and Jim: if he is no longer Huck's namesake, Simons is surely Huck's descendant. On the fishing trip, we see that Simons has, through his relationship with Taurus, come to view the world--and particularly his own white culture--with suspicious eyes. Sitting with a group of black women who are fishing for mullet, Simons recognizes the hypocrisy of one would-be white saint who, while refusing to fish for mullet himself, heaps false praise upon the women for their success ("Lilly, I bleve you gone catch all the fish in the river!"). Simons bristles at the man's condescension: "It's one thing to niggerize a fish and think little of it but here's an asshole who gets out into a mullet run and turns up his nose at them in public" (123). His relationship with Taurus has provided him with an awareness of white duplicity he had lacked earlier, and Simons concludes that the man would have been named Psoriasis, "except somebody named him Billy. Or Billy Ray. Or Billy Ray Bob. Billy Ray Bob Wally Pickett" (123). Simons' play on southern identity here reveals his new ability to see the false nature of such white sympathy. Likewise, it reveals the extent to which he has aligned himself and his own identity with Taurus. Still, he recognizes that he needs further guidance: "There is something to do to this kind of guy but I don't know yet what it is." By the end of the novel, he will have learned.

Unlike Jim, Taurus is not moral guide merely but also Simons' sexual and intellectual/historical counselor as well. As the two sit in a Charleston restaurant one afternoon, Taurus prepares Simons for his first date. Through a window, Simons sees the famed statue of Calhoun: "John Calhoun's out there in bronze about forty feet tall, and it seems he's doing something about the Confederacy by standing up there so very proudly, but I don't know what, because I don't know what he did, if he was a decent Reb or a bad one or anything" (130). As Simons repudiates a central taboo of his southern heritage in sitting down to eat with Taurus, Powell spurns the ingress of southern mythology in the relationship between Simons and Taurus in the novel by denying the significance of southern heritage. As it turns out, Simons is more concerned with matters of the heart than with his southern ancestry. He has fallen in love with the waitress who is Taurus' lover. Not to disappoint, Taurus has instead arranged a double date on which Simons is to lose his virginity with a girl his own age. Simons, apprehensive and speculative, questions Taurus as they leave the restaurant:

"What's happening?"

"We're going sailing," he told me. "With a boatful of willing gentlewomen from the low country."

"Holy God."

"Holy God is right."

Suddenly great old patinaed John Calhoun and the green shutters [Simons' symbols of the Old South] all vanished before what I was sure was the dawning of the real, present South, a new land full not of ghosts but of willing gentlewomen. (132)

Simons consciously rejects the racial entanglements of the Old South symbolized by Calhoun, declares them over and done with. Yet even as he makes this declaration, it is clear that the old issue of the South, if not the peculiar institution then the special problem, is at the forefront of concern in Powell's novel. Indeed, the language he uses, "willing gentlewomen from the low country," suggests that the old order of the antebellum South is firmly in place. The Old South, it seems, is not as easily dismissed as Simons would have it, not even for waiting and willing gentlewomen.

As though to further scrutinize their conflict with southern identity, Taurus and Simons leave the restaurant and walk to a tourist trap in Charleston, where they have snapshots made of themselves in Confederate soldiers' uniforms. To his dismay, Simons finds that they look nothing like the heroes of southern past: "I thought we'd come out looking like J.E.B. Stuart and Nathan Bedford Forrest. Taurus looked more like a criminal and I looked like a mole. But we had them photographs" (140). For Simons, the record of their own confederation is finally more significant than their resemblance to the heroes of the Confederacy. And if they look little like the military heroes of the Old South, they do of course look very much like the first of the literary heroes of the New South, Huck Finn and Jim.

Simons experiences moral growth through his relationship with Taurus only to return finally to his white culture, like many of the white protagonists we've seen before. But Simons, like Huck Finn who must "light out" from white society at the end of his novel, distances himself from white society even as he returns to it. If Huck Finn leaves Jim and all blacks behind in going to the territory, Simons returns to his white society with a new vision of himself and of that society.

Simons realizes that his relationship with Taurus must end when he finally concludes that Taurus and his mother are having an affair, a relationship that stands in the way of his father's return. Simons expresses his desire to have his father come back by removing the fictional titles he has given them: "I did not want to call them the Progenitor and the Doctor but my mother and father, the way Jake would call his mother Momma when he went back to see her every afternoon" (145). Even as Simons prepares to return to his white culture, he expresses the move in the terms of the black characters he has come to know in the course of the novel: Jake, the bartender at the Baby Grand, provides the criterion by which Simons now assesses his attachment to his own parents. When Simons is unable to blame Taurus for having an affair with his mother and equally unable to blame his mother ("Taurus is a sight [and a damn sight] better than ten coroners boiled into one human being if you could

do that."), he concludes simply that there is little sense in blaming anyone. Instead, he recognizes that he remains confused over Taurus' ability to manage his (Simons') life: "He was giving me my mother? And my father? Could he do that? I didn't know" (146). Simons wonders at Taurus' ability to create his own text by returning Simons to the white world from which he came. Simons recognizes that his identity after his relationship with Taurus is largely formed by that relationship. Like Jim, Taurus is at once symbolic brother, mother, and father. Yet, unlike Huck, Simons is cognizant of these roles even as he is confounded by them: "I was a reader turning pages written some time ago, discovering what happened next." Taurus thus gains an autonomy which Jim never possesses: Simons grants him his own authorship. Among the most autonomous of the characters descending from Jim in the southern novels I've considered, Taurus, like Faulkner's Lucas Beauchamp, is shrouded in mystery throughout the protagonist's narrative.

When Simons learns that his parents have decided to remarry, he leaves Edisto for Hilton Head, where he will sip lemonade at the 19th Hole with the golfing set rather than guzzle Colt 45s at the Baby Grand, as he had on Edisto. Taurus leaves for Louisiana, ironically the destination at which Huck and Jim would have arrived had they continued their trip down the Mississippi River. Left behind both Simons and Taurus are the black men and women at the Baby

Grand. They remain at Edisto, forever locked into that world, in Simons' view incapable of stepping into the competitive world beyond the bar. Simons has come to an awareness of his own identity which separates him from the black world at the Baby Grand and, ultimately, from Taurus as well:

Going into the photo parlor, I caught the essence of it. It was that he [Taurus] did not know what his life held and so studied it very closely. And I was different: mine held all the plans the doctor and daddy would negotiate, a cross-hatching of professional ambitions. I was not going to get to be a two-cylinder syntax dude at the Grand. I was, I am--I have to admit, that because my life is cloyed by practical plans and unattainable hopes--I am white. Best thing to do, I figure, is to get on with it. So I said let's go in that joint for commemorative photos, my heart really beating then. I had one of these white hearts that lub-dub this way: then-next; and Taurus had one of these that go now-next; and the guys at the Grand went now-now. And you can't change that with decisions to be cool. You can't get to that now-now without a congenital blessing or disease, whichever applies. (176)

Like Huck Finn and the protagonists we've seen in so many southern novels, Simons finally accepts racial division: in Powell's characterization of the men at the Baby Grand we see a measure of Twain's return to stereotype. Simons actively accepts a return to his white identity which he associates with such stereotypes: "I am white." Yet even as makes this return, he recognizes Taurus' significance in his own development and Taurus's unique detachment from either white or black society, a characteristic which parallels Simons' own detachment at the end of the novel.

Leaving Edisto for Hilton Head, Simons passes the Baby Grand and concludes that it is "a crummy dive-looking joint you'd never go in if you didn't know" (164). His return to the white community is accompanied by a new order which closely resembles the old order of the South: "We got into some big oaks finally and then I started seeing pruned trees. Yards with grass in them. Heavy post fences. Private drives. A Mercedes. Negro on a mowing machine cut a swath about eight feet wide. Hilton Head" (164). But even as Simons has begun to accept his white identity and the coinciding white landscapes of Hilton Head, he distances himself from that identity and from white culture: "I got to heave to, hard-to-lee, or I'll get in the same trap I was in. Just because this place looks like a layout on a ping-pong table don't mean it ain't happening right here too. Whatever's happening" (181). His relationship with Taurus has given him the ability to maintain such a critical distance in his white society even as he returns to it. Simons portrays his arrival with his family at Hilton Head as a return of the old "Southern barony" he spoke of early in the novel: "Theenie hauls in here, finds the vacuum, falls to in a minute." And Simons begrudgingly accepts his role in the reformed barony--"It's the modern world. I have to accept it. I'm a pioneer"--even as he laments the absence of "mullet or mullet people."

Despite his return to white society and his apparent acceptance of its institutions, however, Simons retains the moral growth he gained in his relationship with Taurus as he interacts with the people of Hilton Head. The Baby Grand is replaced by the 19th Hole, and Simons looks at the white men there with an ironic distance taken from his relationship with Taurus. When Simons fails to recognize the name of pro golfer Sam Snead, for instance, he is whimsically belittled by the golf pro at the 19th Hole:

"This young fella never heard of Slammin' Sammy Snead," he tells them [the men at the bar], and I'm a curiosity all over again. Then they tell me about the beautiful, glorious, gone past of golfing greats who were not kids off scholarship college golf teams but gentlemen who honed themselves on the grindstone of caddying for two bits a round. You never see these guys fold their arms and smoke and look for hours at a wall, knowing they don't know the whole alphabet of success, have all the pieces. They know the whole alphabet of worldly maneuver.

And how, I have to find out, did they ever to come to think they know that? (182-183)

The men at the golf club assume a superiority which Simons will not allow them: we see Simons retaining moral growth here in his refusal to accept the condescension implied by their superior bearing. Earlier in the novel, Simons detects a condescending demeanor in the white character he dubs 'Psoriasis,' and he rejects that condescension and links himself with the black women on the pier in taking home mullet for himself. The scene at the 19th Hole, as Sybil Estes argues, emphasizes the novel's intent to assess the "white bourgeois southern values" (480) which Simons'

father and the golfing set on Hilton Head exemplify. Taurus has bestowed upon Simons the ability to see the world through ironic and aware eyes; indeed, Taurus has left a gift for Simons when he departs, "an old wooden stereo-viewer" (160). The gift suggests a new way of seeing still secured to an older vision, that of Mark Twain and Huck Finn. And if he is Huck Finn born 100 years later--and indeed, Powell's novel was published in 1984, precisely 100 years after the publication of Huck Finn--Simons is not one to reject society because it confounds him at the conclusion of his narrative. Rather, he declares that he sees society for what it is.

Powell's novel re-evaluates Twain in a contemporary context, ultimately concluding that Twain captured much of the very southern confusion over racial relations in his novel. Simons Manigault is certainly a modern Huck Finn: when Powell abandons the name of 'Huckleberry Perry' for his protagonist, however, he takes his character beyond the limitations which Twain established. If Simons Manigault is finally a white protagonist as failed in establishing an ongoing relationship with his Jim, he is unlike the protagonists we've examined in that he retains the moral growth which he takes from the relationship.

In Can't Quit You, Baby (1988), Ellen Douglas--a pseudonym for Josephine Haxton--draws heavily from black culture in developing a narrative much indebted to Huck Finn: she takes the title from the Willie Dixon song and Dixon's songs are ever upon the lips of Tweet, Douglas's primary black character. Like Mark Twain and numerous of the authors I've discussed above, Douglas debunks racial stereotypes through the education of her white protagonist. Douglas's self-reflexive narrator periodically reviews the extent to which she herself employs stereotype in developing her narrative. In so doing, she withdraws from Twain's style of narrative and recognizes the apparent impossibility of avoiding stereotype altogether. As in Go Down Moses and Intruder in the Dust, white and black culture in Douglas' novel are intertwined and interdependent, and this union obliges Douglas's wealthy white protagonist to overcome her superficial and stereotyped impression of her black housekeeper, Julia Carrier, or "Tweet." The two women learn from one another as they share their family stories.

Douglas establishes the tone and scope of her novel from the outset, when Cornelia asks Julia if she knows that Wayne Jones, a local white man, has died. Julia replies only, "Serve him right" (3), before telling Cornelia of the times when she worked for Jones and he attempted to rape her.

Douglas emphasizes Cornelia's outward indifference to Tweet's plight as a black woman: "Cornelia nods, I don't believe it, she says. Julia, I just don't believe it. But of course she does" (10). And Douglas's novel ultimately centers upon this indifference: Cornelia must confront her inability to acknowledge Tweet's lowered status as a black woman before she can fully transcend the apparent limitations of her own white identity.

Though she recognizes that "there is no getting around in these stories of two lives that the black woman is the white woman's servant" (4) the narrator tells us that her characters "would be uneasy" with the titles "servant" and "mistress," in part because of the implications such titles bring about in the South. She charges the reader to avoid thinking of the racial stereotypes associated with the Old South in giving title to her characters: "So, let's settle for housekeeper and employer. Yes, that's better. And try for now to be absentminded about race and class, place and time, even about poverty and wealth, security and deprivation" (5). The contradictions here are of course many, however, and the narrator attempts to swallow them up in addressing them. In declaring that she is ill at ease with the old terms for the relationship between her characters, she challenges the stereotypes inherent in "servant" and "mistress." Immediately after such challenge, however, she establishes Cornelia firmly in the role of the

good mistress familiar to readers of Stowe. She reminds the reader to be absentminded about the racial "situations" which she will not address as such: Cornelia's helping Tweet to register to vote, for instance, and Tweet's distress upon hearing of John Kennedy's assassination just after she has been served dinner to Cornelia's family. "You point out that by listing them I've included them?" the narrator whimsically concludes, "Ah well, I didn't say it was possible. I said, Try" (5).

Douglas further recognizes the impossibility of her own characters interacting without confronting race and racial stereotype: "To them race sounded the endlessly repeated ground bass above and entwined with which they danced the passacaglia (or, as it may sometimes appear, the boogie) of their lives" (5). Douglas's language reveals her larger purpose: rather than allow her comparison to rest on the "passacaglia," a dance of European origin, and thus to be defined in "white" terminology, she extends her comparison to the "boogie," a description rising out of the black culture at the center of American jazz. Her recognition of the impossibility of escaping stereotype, and of the resultant need to attempt just such an escape, is the most overt acknowledgment of conscious intent in the southern novels that I've examined here.

Douglas's narrator pointedly recognizes the condescension inherent in Cornelia's character. Though Cornelia

"considered herself a listener" to Tweet's narratives, she takes pride in such an identity largely because of her ability to suppress the disdain with which she occasionally listens: she "has never by a word or gesture betrayed the boredom, the condescension she sometimes feels, her rejection of the moral code that Tweet's stories sometimes imply, her doubts about the verity of some outlandish set of events" (13-14). Douglas thus establishes the difference in moral codes between Cornelia and Tweet in order to reveal Cornelia's attempts to suppress her sense of condescension. In the course of the novel, Cornelia will come to accept Tweet's own moral code to a greater degree than she is able here. Likewise, Tweet will compel her to see the condescension which she exposes even as she vainly claims she has overcome it. If, early in the novel, Tweet's stories are for Cornelia like "the flowers that she sticks in a jelly glass and sets in the window by the kitchen sink and forgets" (14), she will hold them in much greater esteem by the conclusion of her narrative. Here, however the analogy she uses to describe Tweet's stories--"flowers she sticks in a jelly glass"--reveals Cornelia's sense of her own superiority, implying that Tweet's stories are in fact Cornelia's.

Cornelia assumes a special relationship between herself and Tweet, and the fact that she is nearly totally deaf symbolizes the way in which Cornelia interacts with black

characters: she literally and metaphorically cannot hear Tweet. Douglas's novel ultimately confronts this dilemma. While Cornelia does not often turn up her hearing aid to listen to her husband John or others in her family, she does claim to pay special attention to Cornelia. But she does so only in the context of her position as employer: she listens to "people who are--yes, say it--purveyors of services of one kind or another, that is, who in Cornelia's view must be heard, who depend, at the least, upon her direction, but often, too, on her advice, her justice, or her generosity" (15). Though she can ignore her family members and her white friends, she cannot ignore Tweet or other blacks in her society because of the paternal relationship she assumes with them. Thus even as she claims to hear Tweet, she is unable to hear her as an individual outside of the stereotypes she associates with "purveyors of services." Like Huck Finn electing not to tell Jim that "these ain't no real kings er dukes," Cornelia assumes a position of power over the blacks whom she encounters. It is this sense of self-importance that Douglas disputes throughout her novel, so that by the end she will portray Cornelia as having successfully overcome such patriarchal posturing as a direct result of her relationship with Tweet.

Though the narrator has earlier charged her reader to ignore the issue of race, she reverses herself as the narrative develops, recognizing that ultimately the reader,

like the writer, must challenge stereotypes of black and white:

I want you to believe her [the narrator], but there are pitfalls in the path of her narrative that I must make you aware of. You may have assumed that she is a white woman. But perhaps you've not yet thought how difficult it is for her to be true to her tale.

She begins, as every story teller does, with the illusion of freedom. Whose story will she choose to tell? It's her prerogative to decide. . . . she has the power to distort, if she chooses to exercise it. She must resist the temptation to satisfy her sense of how Tweet and Cornelia *ought* to behave; must resist the need to keep herself comfortable. . . . I encourage myself that, although it is difficult, it's perhaps not impossible for the tale-teller to rise above her limitations, escape the straitjacket of her own life. (38-39)

Like Powell in the early manuscript of Edisto, Douglas here directly addresses the dilemmas involved in attempting to portray white and black characters interacting in a southern setting. In acknowledging the "limitations" of one's race and background, she challenges the literary stereotypes which entangle the narratives of the white southern authors I've considered above. In the process she acknowledges the difficulties inherent in her attempt to portray white and black characters interacting without stereotype. She later professes to be not as sure of her own position as is Cornelia, who, unlike Tweet, "won't lose her footing, she's sure of it. She won't, like Tweet, find herself sinking into the dark water among slimy cypress knees and alligators and alligator gars" (39). Cornelia's moral education is mostly a matter of attaining an ideology paralleling that of the narrator: by the end of the novel she will have attained

an ambivalence toward white identity much like that of the narrator.

When, late in the novel, Cornelia finds herself alone and confused for the first time in her life, she begins to comprehend the extent to which she depends upon Tweet. Cornelia's husband John has a stroke as they are flying home, and he dies shortly after she has berated him and their children for protectively keeping the family problems from her throughout their marriage: "You fucking bastard, she whispers in his ear. You bastard. I know. I know. All these years. You... You... To have secrets with them... To conspire with them against me. . . . I hate you. I hate all of you. Every one of you." (153). No 'sweet sorrow' here. Yet Cornelia is overwhelmed with guilt at her words once she realizes that John has died, and she cannot tell the stewardess who to call to drive her home. Finally, after much prodding, she answers: "Call Julia Carrier, she said. Her telephone number is 638-3873. Then, No, she said. That's my number. Her number is 670-1283." For the first time in their relationship, Cornelia overtly recognizes Tweet as a source of moral support. Here she remembers Tweet before her own children, even mistaking her own identity for Tweet's in confusing their phone numbers. Just at the moment she is symbolically parted from her own family and thus her own white culture, she clings to Tweet and the support that Tweet's black culture offers.

Yet immediately after Cornelia comes to accept her need for Tweet and her dependence upon her, she ironically denies Tweet's black identity when she confronts it in the midst of white society. At John's funeral, Tweet is scandalized at the lack of respect she sees for her former employer: "You supposed to give somebody a decent burial" (158), she says, bemoaning the lack of pomp and circumstance surrounding the funeral, a lacking that she associates with whiteness: "they're as crazy as any other white people" [158] she laments. Cornelia quietly ignores Tweet's protests, however, and when Tweet attends the funeral, Cornelia disregards her plaintive laments:

Tweet lit among them all like a painted bunting, a peacock among sparrows, crows, cowbirds, starlings; iridescent in a dress of teal blue, shot, like a peacock's tail, like a grackle's neck feathers, with shining green and purple threads, the skirt full and rustling. Rustling and resplendent, she settled among those drab birds and mourned John for Cornelia with peacock cries, while all around her the sparrows turned away, hopped to another twig, shielding themselves from her brilliance, and twittered their sad farewells. And Cornelia turned off her hearing aid and gazed at John's face staring out at her from among the laurel leaves. (161)

The passage is notable not only for its revelation of Cornelia's anxious withdrawal from the black world which Tweet represents for her, but also for the extent to which it reveals the narrator's bias. The terms with which Douglas describes Tweet ("rustling and resplendent," "brilliance") depict the customs of mourning which she brings from black culture as superior to those of white

culture. Black being, on the one hand, is vibrant and abundant, while white being--represented by gloomy "drab birds"--is dull and lifeless, accepting death when it comes. This of course is but another stereotype of both black and white being, albeit one informed by jazz and Norman Mailer. The attraction of the white narrator for black being is no longer merely in kind. The passage implies that whites can now not only overcome the guilt they feel as white southerners by looking for moral guidance from a black southerner. Now whites can have soul as well, they can be hip, by looking to their black counterparts. Cornelia, for her part, understands none of this at this point in the novel, but the narrator has tipped off the reader. By the end of the novel, Cornelia will learn how to be hip. Likewise, the narrator will discover her own biases and distance herself from Cornelia.

In the aftermath of John's death, Cornelia goes to stay with her son and daughter-in-law, where she remains guilt-ridden and despondent. When her son attempts to get her interested again in her own life, she flees to New York, where city life threatens but where she believes she can learn to be alone. Taking a taxi from the airport to a friend's empty apartment, she is at once terrified and aroused by the "swarthy, bearded" (184) taxi driver: "A sexual thrill of dread tingles in her breasts, her thighs, when she thinks about these possibilities. To be raped,

murdered. . ." (184). Once again, she retreats into a fear of darkness and the unknown from which Tweet will eventually rescue her. Like her initial trepidation and fear of Tweet, her fears of the taxi driver prove to be unfounded: "In front of her apartment, the driver turns, gazes at her, smiles. See, lady, he says. Wasn't nothing to worry about. I got you here OK, didn't I?" (185). Like Tweet, the taxi driver must overcome Cornelia's fears of darkness in order to persuade her away from her stereotyped thinking.

In New York, Cornelia looks to her relationship with Tweet to overcome her fear of the unknown, and, indeed, of the loneliness she has felt since John died. Tweet's voice comes to her just as she is entering her friend's apartment from a darkened stairwell:

What am I doing here?

Inside her head a swelling and vibration, but no one answered.

She fumbled with a numb hand for her keys, scurried up the dark stairs, down the dingy hall. Something behind her?

The dark!

She feels a crawling weight of darkness moving nearer at her back, for a moment sees Tweet's face close to hers, hears her voice: Evil out there. I be a fool not to know that. (189)

As we've seen so often in these novels, the white protagonist finds her black guide just at the moment when she is most lost. As Huck casts about on Jackson's Island, dead to all the world, he happens upon Jim. Here Tweet is not so comforting, defining danger for Cornelia and warning her, but not shielding her from it. The "evil" that

Cornelia recalls comes from Tweet's narrative, in which she relates her fear of her father. In remembering Tweet's fear now, Cornelia joins her own narrative with Tweet's, and the two will--for the most part--remain joined in the final sections of the novel.

When she returns to the South and to Tweet, who has herself been near death and is bedridden, Cornelia attempts to explain what Tweet has done for her: "You don't know it yet, but you've. . . you've been with me--I mean in New York. I've been in New York and you were--there. Oh, it's hard to tell about, but you were. I heard you" (237-238). When Tweet (like McCullers' Berenice) rebuffs her attempt to join their two causes, Cornelia implores her, "Oh listen to me, please. . . . It's about coming back into the world" (242). Like numerous of the characters we've examined above, Cornelia experiences a moral rebirth through her relationship with Tweet.

In a direct address late in the novel to the reader, Douglas' narrator confesses that she is not as understanding of Tweet's life as she had earlier thought herself to be: "I thought I was at home in Tweet's life, that when she spoke, I heard her speak with her own authentic voice." She has come to recognize, however, the distance between herself and the black community represented by her character: "But of course, I never heard her speak, except to Cornelia. Does that trouble you as it does me?" (239-240) The narrator

admits that she, like Cornelia, has not yet taken Tweet out of stereotype, that she has indeed not been able to "rise above" the "limitations" of literary stereotype of which she spoke early in the novel. She recalls the point at which she had beseeched her reader to be "absentminded" about race: "Cornelia and Tweet, I wrote, might have other, more complex business with each other. Other business, yes. Sometimes. But surely not more complex business." If the characters themselves might forget the issue of race, the narrator now for the first time recognizes her own inability to portray them in such a way that the reader might forget such stereotypes: "But the truth is that there is no way Tweet could present herself so that you would be absentminded. No way. She is black. Cornelia is white. She is servant. Cornelia is mistress. She is poor" (239-240). Douglas's narrator--a thin guise for the southern writer generally--recognizes the ways in which racial stereotype intrudes upon the narrative from the perspective of both reader and writer.

On a day shortly after Tweet has regained her voice from her illness, Cornelia discovers that Tweet has stolen a gold barrette from Cornelia's house. The knowledge shocks Cornelia and she confronts Tweet in disbelief. With Tweet's angry response, Cornelia discovers for the first time the extent to which her own indifference toward her housekeeper has been matched by Tweet's spite:

Hated you, Tweet says. She rocks back, leans forward in her chair. You ain't got sense enough to know I hated you. I hate you all my life, before I know you. . . . Every day, every hour of my entire life from the day I'm born. Hate you when you acting like you the only woman ever got sorrow when her husband die. I hate you, hate you, hate you. And I steal that gold barrette to remind me of it, in case I forget. She laughs. Sometimes I forget, she says.

Damn you, then, Cornelia says. I hate you, too.
(254-255)

In none of the novels I examine in my first four chapters do we see a black character reacting to a white character with such vehemence. Up and out of Tom's cabin--where the white southern writer has kept such literary figures--she reproves Cornelia for her utter inability to escape white stereotypes of blacks: "Talking all that shit about me being with you in New York. You ain't never seen me, heard me in your entire life and you talking that shit. I wasn't in no New York. I was down here . . ." (255). Tweet will admit to being neither mentor nor deliverer, and in her refusal to do so, she gains complete autonomy from the literary stereotypes we've seen in the southern novel. Likewise, her words force Douglas's narrator to portray Tweet free of condescension and stereotype.

In tossing off Cornelia's attempts to gloss over their relationship, Tweet compels the narrator to recognize her independence from Cornelia and from the model that Twain provides. No longer tied to the white protagonist of the novel, she can now view Tweet outside of the parameters which Twain established and completely outside Cornelia's

perspective. In like manner, she allows the reader to see Tweet's independence and complexity.

But as Cornelia walks away from Tweet on the final page of the novel, the two recognize that the enmity they share is part of their interdependence. When Cornelia turns to look back at Tweet for a final time, "Tweet sings out suddenly: Oh, I love you, baby, but I sure do hate your ways. She's laughing and singing at the same time. I say, I love you, darlin, but I hate your treacherous low down ways. That's how the song goes" (256). Tweet's assessment of their relationship--made through Dixon's song--ironically reverses the account of Wayne Jones's sexual exploitation of Tweet with which the novel begins. Tweet directly assesses Cornelia's moral worth with her implication that Cornelia is "treacherous" and "low" (recalling Jim's admonishment of Huck after the fog passage). Still, the words of the song remind the two of the extent to which they are unable to escape the bonds between them despite the hatred which both have expressed.

At the end of her novel, as at the beginning, Douglas depends upon texts from black culture to comment on the relationship between the two women. Willie Dixon ultimately clarifies the relationship in a way that the narrator admits she cannot. While Huck Finn speaks for Jim throughout his novel, Tweet gains her own voice--literally and metaphorically--in Can't Quit You, Baby. Whereas in her

illness she had lost her ability to speak, she regains it when Cornelia begins to make broad assumptions about the nature of their relationship. Tweet demands for herself the right to define her own role in the relationship. Even at the end of her novel, Douglas's narrator recognizes her own inability to represent fully the experience of her black characters. She avoids the sentimentality of Twain's ending and likewise avoids Twain's return to stereotype.

iv

Powell and Douglas come to an awareness of the pattern Mark Twain established and are able to consistently manipulate it, Powell in his portrayal of a black character free of dependency upon his white protagonist and Douglas through the development her own self-conscious narrator. Carolyn Porter defines a central crisis of the American writer as one in which he "discovers his participation within the world he has thought to stand outside" (xviii). Powell and Douglas employ just such a discovery to overcome the barriers established in the southern novel following Twain. Whereas earlier writers, like Twain, finally express the traditional ideology of their southern society, Douglas and Powell are able to effectively subvert that ideology.

CONCLUSION

When William Dean Howells called Twain the "Lincoln of our Literature" (84), he was thinking not of race but of literary stature. As it turns out, Twain was an emancipator of sorts for the southern novelist. After Huckleberry Finn, the southern writer is no longer limited to purely stereotyped portrayals of black characters and glorification of the antebellum South, though certainly the twentieth century has provided us with plenty of both. But if Twain emancipated, he likewise enslaved, as we see when, in the final third of Huckleberry Finn, he returns Jim to the minstrelsy and stereotype from which he had removed him.

Lionel Trilling's assessment that Huck Finn "reads us" (Carrington 191) is apt: white American society measures its moral self by its own engagement with black society, and Twain's novel claims to be engaged with black society even when Huck abandons Jim to literary minstrelsy at the end of the novel. But of course Twain's Jim is the namesake of Jim Crow, so perhaps we might have expected segregation at Twain's conclusion. What is more surprising is the way in which the contemporary southern novel reflects the racial division which Twain established.

What Mark Twain is ultimately up to in Huckleberry Finn--like Harriet Beecher Stowe in Uncle Tom's Cabin--is neither freeing black culture nor enslaving it but stealing from it: Huckleberry Finn is a slave narrative with heroes and themes acceptable to a white readership. The popular identification of white America with Huck Finn has more to do with guilt than with freedom, and Huck's story offers a means of assuaging lingering guilt over the treatment of African-Americans. Houston Baker suggests that black culture's art forms have "been adjusted to suit the needs of white America--to reinforce stereotypes and sometimes even to justify the victimization of the black American" (135). Thus when the African-American writers I consider here repudiate Huckleberry Finn, they are reclaiming the slave narrative and likewise the narrative of the interplay of black and white America.

In two contemporary southern novels, Edisto and Can't Quit You, Baby, two southern writers effectively confront the condescension of the Huck Finn model and the apparent inability of many southern white writers to portray autonomous black characters. No longer attempting to "pass" as black, the white protagonists of these novels instead recognize the independence of the black characters. And when there is moral growth here, the characters retain it beyond the moments in which they interact with their black mentors.

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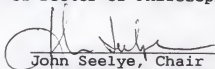
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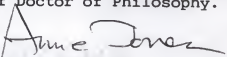
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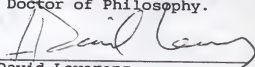
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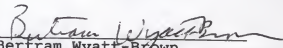
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